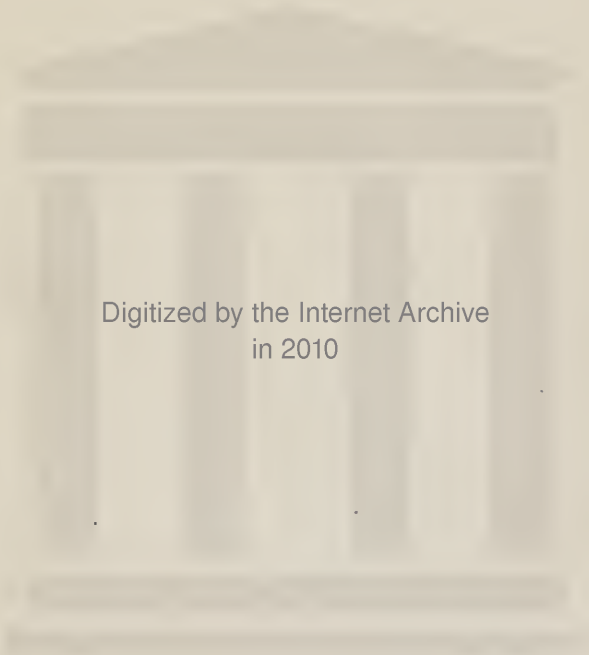
DOROTHY HARCOURT'S SECRET

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH





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DOROTHY HARCOURT'S SECRET

Sequel to "A Deed Without a Name"

BY

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"To His Fate," "The Lost Heir," "A Noble Lord," "Sweet Love's Atonement," "Zenobia's Suitors," Etc.



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DOROTHY HARCOURT'S SECRET.

Dorothy Harcourt's Secret

CHAPTER I

EARLY IN THE MORNING

It was one o'clock on Christmas morning when the Christmas sleigh returned to the Wesleyan Flats, bringing Santa Claus and his two aids.

As soon as the three alighted, a man from the livery stable, who had been engaged to meet them at that hour, mounted the box to take the conveyance home; but not before he had received a liberal gift.

The house was all ablaze with light.

There had been Christmas Eve festivals in almost every suit of apartments in it.

Mr. Merritt lifted little Owlet—so tired and so sleepy, yet so divinely happy—and bore her into the house.

'Pollyon Syphax was on duty in the hall, and stared at the three figures in the black waterproofs that covered their disguises from head to foot.

They went upon the elevator, reached Roma's parlor and found her reclining in her armchair by the center table, reading the "Golden Legend" by the light of a shaded lamp.

Madame Nouvellini lay fast asleep in her invalid chair, nor did she wake up on the entrance of the party .

"What sort of a time did you have?" inquired Roma, as the weary Santa Claus sat down on the sofa with the sleeping child across his knees.

"A very fine time. The ground, or rather the snow, was so hard and smooth, and the horses so fresh, that

I am sure they got over the ground with more than steam-engine express speed! Guided by our policeman, I think we visited every poor neighborhood, and even every criminal locality in the ten miles' square."

"That was right; for there are innocent children everywhere, even in the guiltiest haunts. Ah, poor children! If I have lost Will Harcourt, I must devote my life and all it holds to them! What am I saying? Whether I have lost him or not, I will devote all that I may of my life to the rescue of the lost children?"

"What!" inquired the lawyer. "Is your stout heart failing that you talk of the possibility of losing Will Harcourt?"

"Oh, no! I do hope—but 'hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' No news comes," sighed Roma.

"The young man may have been smuggled on board some outbound ship—may be across the ocean by this time!"

"What makes you think so?"

"I do not exactly think so. I only throw out the idea on speculation, as a possible explanation of the failure of all our plans to discover him! Well, my dear, I must be going now! It is twenty minutes past one. I suppose the people in this house mean to keep it up all night. To-morrow I shall come and give you a report of to-night's work—'To-morrow?' It is to-morrow now!—Christmas is more than an hour old!" said the lawyer, as he arose and carefully laid the sleeping child on the sofa.

"We made a great many people happy to-night, but the happiest of all was little Owlet! There are children's parties in the mansions of the rich everywhere, but I doubt if any among them enjoyed themselves as little Owlet did to-night. She has gone to sleep, tired out with a surfeit of happiness. Good-evening, my dear," he said, warmly pressing Roma's hand. "Come, boy!" he added, shaking up the dozing Tom, who, Virginia negro fashion, had dropped himself down on the floor and gone to sleep.

When the two had left the room, Roma knelt down by the sofa, and began to undress the child softly and

deftly, so as not to awaken her if it were possible to avoid doing so.

Mr. Merritt had already taken off her mask, and the removal of her other disguises was comparatively easy.

But as Roma rolled her gently over, stealing, as it were, her clothing off her, the child partly awoke, and murmured in her sleep:

"Oh, you dear little baby—here's—a dolly for you, and—candy and——" She dropped into deeper sleep with the words on her lips.

Roma put the child in her own bed. Then she looked at Marguerite, and saw that she was sleeping well, with ice water, milk and all else within reach that she might want during the remainder of the night.

Then at length Roma herself went to bed and to sleep, and slept soundly, notwithstanding the loud revelry that was going on over her head and under her feet, and on the opposite side of the hall.

Late as was the hour when she retired, she awoke quite refreshed at her usual time—seven o'clock in the morning. Her little bedfellow was still sound asleep, living over in dreams the happiest ride and night she had ever had in her little life.

Roma covered the sleeping face with a thin handkerchief, and then opened the windows to air the room and passed into the parlor.

Her protégée, Marguerite Nouvellini, was not only awake, but sitting up in her adjustable chair, with a breakfast tray before her.

"I was so hungry when I woke up that I wheeled myself in reach of the bell, and rang and ordered breakfast. Did you care?" she inquired, seeing Roma's surprised look.

"Oh, no, my dear," Roma hastened to say; "though if you had touched the timbre on your stand, you would have waked me, and I could have done it all for you and saved you the fatigue of pushing yourself about the room."

"Oh, it did not tire me—not at all. Oh, this chair! I don't believe that even you, who bought it for me,

know half its merits. I said it was bed and chair and carriage to me. It is more than that. It is legs! I can go where I please about the room with just the lightest little push on this little knob. See!"

And the invalid wheeled herself around the room and back again to her stand.

"I see," said Roma; "it works easily, and you are so much stronger."

"Oh, ever so much stronger and better. I shall soon get well now. Thanks to you, dear friend. But I should never have got better if you had not brought me out of that miserable room, where the only choice I had was between sitting in the bitter cold or having a smoking fire in the wretched little iron stove, and I think the smoke was worse than the cold. And then that straight-backed little chair! And the diet of bread and tea, that was always cold before it reached me! Ah, I was dying of discomfort more than of a cough when you found and rescued me. And now, in this lovely room, in this lovely chair, and with the clean, soft steam heat, and all the good things you give me to eat day and night, and, above all, you yourself! You are always breathing the breath of life over me—if it is not a sin to say it. And I shall soon be well and strong. And, oh! may the Lord open some way for me to show my love and gratitude to you! I have not talked so much as this since the day I was taken down sick," she concluded, with a smile.

"No, dear, you have not, nor do I think it wise in you to tax your strength in doing so now," said Roma.

But the invalid was in a talking mood.

"When I woke up this morning, the first thing I saw was Owlet's mask and dress, and I knew she had got home safe," she said.

"Oh, yes! and she was in bed long before several other children of the house who were dancing; and Mr. Merritt thinks she was happier than them all," said Roma.

While they talked together, little Owlet suddenly appeared before them, ready dressed for breakfast.

She had risen in her quiet way and made her simple toilet silently.

Then Roma produced her Christmas presents, a lovely wadded silk dressing gown for Madame Marguerite, and a workbox, completely fitted, for Owlet. Both were delighted, and declared—what all people declare to the giver of Christmas gifts—that the present was just exactly what the receiver most wanted.

"I am glad you didn't give me a doll," said Owlet.

"Why?" inquired Roma, with a smile.

"I don't like dolls."

"But why?"

"Because they are not alive."

"Oh! But neither are workboxes alive," said Roma, smiling.

"But workboxes don't look as if they are alive, and dolls do. Besides, workboxes are so useful, and dolls are of no use on the face of the earth."

"Not to play with?"

"No. Who wants to play with a thing that looks like it ought to be alive, and ain't?" inquired this solemn little monster.

"Why, all the little girls I ever saw loved to play with dolls," said Roma, much amused by the oddity of the "type" before her.

"Then if they do, I think they are not possessed of common sense."

"You are certainly a fairy changeling. You can't be a human child," said Roma.

"I don't know about that. I don't remember what I was at first. I only remember being Madame Marguerite's little girl. And now I am going upstairs to go to the bottom of mamma's big trunk and get my Christmas present for you," said Owlet; and away she sped.

Her mother called her back, and said:

"Bring the little red morocco case down with you, too."

"With papa's picture?"

"Yes, with papa's picture."

The child flew away, and after a little space re-

turned with the miniature case in one hand and a small casket in the other. She thrust the case into her mother's hand and then ran eagerly to Roma, opened the little casket, and displayed a simple little necklace of turquoise beads.

"This is for you. Oh! try it around your throat. Please do. It will look so lovely on your white throat."

Roma kissed the child, took the necklace, and clasped it around her neck.

"There! It just suits you! Don't it? It is blue, like your eyes. But your eyes are darker. Mamma said I might give you this," said Owlet in delight.

Meanwhile, Madame Marguerite was opening the little case.

"Here," she said, "I want you to look at the picture of my husband. See how handsome he was!"

Roma took the miniature, which was in the form of a locket, and set around with a circle of pearls of the purest quality.

But as soon as her eyes fell upon the pictured face it took all her great self-control to keep still.

"Is he not handsome?" inquired Madame Marguerite.

"Many people might think so," answered Roma.

"Don't you think so?" asked the widow, with a little tone of disappointment.

"I am a blonde, which is, perhaps, the reason why I do not much admire fair men."

"Oh! I see."

"This was your husband, you say?"

"Yes, of course."

"What was his name?"

"Guilliaume Nouvellini."

"A Frenchman?"

"Yes. There's where I got my French name, for I am not a French woman, though I did dance at the Theatre Française and the Gaieté."

"How long ago did he marry you?" inquired Roma, with consummate self-command.

"Six years ago this New Year. And we were very

happy for about another year. Then he died, when little Owlet was but three months old. Well, all that is past and gone these five years ago. One must not dwell on one's past sorrows if one means to live and work in this world."

"Pardon me for asking so many questions, but I feel very deeply interested in this matter," said Roma, as she gazed on the miniature. "But—was your husband with you when he died?"

"Ah, me! No. I was in Paris with my young babe. He had to go to San Francisco on some very pressing business, I know not what, and there he was taken ill of some fatal fever. He wrote me several letters while he was on his sick bed. Then at last came a letter from his physician, announcing his death, and a newspaper with his obituary in it. Ah, me! It was a great sorrow, but one must not dwell on their own sorrows if they want to be of any use in this world. I did not have that locket brought down here merely to show you my poor husband's handsome face, but to do this. Please let me have the locket again."

Roma put it in her hand.

She touched a little spring, took the miniature out of the jeweled locket, and put the latter in Roma's hand, saying:

"I want you to have these pearls, dear. You see, they are very fine, else I would not offer them. Do take them, dear. They are all I have to give you. Get them reset in a brooch, and wear it sometimes for my sake."

Roma took the pearls, and kissed the forehead of the donor with tears in her own eyes.

But Madame Marguerite was pressing the dis-set picture to her lips and to her heart.

"Are we going to have any breakfast to-day, ma'am? You and I, I mean. My stomach has gone to my backbone," said Owlet.

"Come, my dear; we will go down," replied Roma, who, since she had had an invalid domiciled in her parlor, and a little companion to accompany her to the restaurant, always went there for meals.

"Now we will see what they will give us for a Christmas breakfast," said Owlet as she entered the elevator.

"What would you like?" inquired Roma.

"Milk, real milk, not milk and water; cake and preserved strawberries."

"A rather bilious bill of fare, Owlet."

"Well, then, I won't eat it; and mind you don't, either! A person ought not to eat anything to make them sick; any person who does that is not possessed of common sense," said Owlet authoritatively.

"I think you are quite right, ma'am," said Roma, smiling.

"What makes you always call me ma'am? I'm not a married woman."

"Oh, you are not!"

"Why, of course not. I'm not even engaged. You know I'm not. So what makes you call me ma'am?" demanded Owlet.

"Well," said Roma, slowly and thoughtfully, "in high courtesy, ladies of distinction, married or unmarried, are, or used to be, always addressed as 'madam,' or 'ma'am.' Now I think a young personage like yourself, who is too wise to hear a fairy tale because you say it is not true—though it may be, for aught you know—or to play with a doll because it is not alive—though they may also be in some sense—ought certainly to be honored with the title of madam."

Owlet gazed at the lady in solemn and sorrowful wonder and disapprobation, and then she gave utterance to her feelings:

"If anybody else in this world but you was to talk like that I know what I should think."

"Well, what?" inquired the amused lady.

"They were not possessed of common sense," said Owlet gloomily.

"Very few people are so happily endowed according to your standard."

The elevator came down, with a little jar, to the basement floor, and Roma led her small friend out into the hall and through to the restaurant.

"We are not mad with each other, are we?" inquired Owlet as they seated themselves at one of the remote corner tables.

"Why, certainly not! We are the best of friends always."

"I'm glad of that, because I only told the truth, and it was for your good, too; because I do love you, really."

The breakfast bill of fare laid before them by the obsequious waiter arrested attention and stopped the conversation; and after the meal was served Owlet was too much engaged with her milk, bread and eggs to favor Roma with any more "wisdom in solid "chunks."

When they returned to the parlor upstairs they found Mr. Merritt there, waiting for Roma.

"Any news of Will Harcourt?" she inquired as she shook hands with him.

"None whatever. We must do now what we should have done in the beginning—advertise for him," replied the lawyer.

"You mean in the personal columns of the daily papers and by initials and guarded hints?"

"No. I mean by a straightforward advertisement in the advertising columns for information respecting the whereabouts of William Everard Harcourt, late of Lone Lodge, West Virginia, who left his home on the Isle of Storms, coast of Maryland, on the fifteenth of last November, and has not been heard from since, and offering a large reward for intelligence that shall lead to the discovery of his fate."

"That will be making his mysterious disappearance very public."

"Yes; but it is absolutely the only hope left of finding him."

"But if this advertisement should come to the knowledge of his poor mother?"

"My dear lady, Dorothy Harcourt, by all accounts, is not in a mental condition to appreciate it. She thinks her son is at his college. She has forgotten

all recent events—that is, if we may credit the report of Miss Wynthrop."

"Yes, I know. Well, since it is so absolutely necessary you may insert the advertisement in all the papers."

"Now, my dear child, there is another matter on which I wish to speak to you. You, who were a very queen of society, why do you seclude yourself from the world here in the midst of Washington City in the height of the fashionable season? Why do you not send your cards to your friends who are present here, and would be so glad to invite you to their parties."

"Oh, Mr. Merritt, how can I, under present circumstances? I have no wish to go out. Although I have done no wrong, I feel as if I were a social pariah."

"That is morbid—very morbid! The story of your wrongs is not known at all beyond the precincts of the judicial chambers; and even if it were known, it would only invest you with a deeper interest, that would hold much admiration and no censure whatever."

"I could not tolerate such a personal interest, Mr. Merritt," replied Roma.

"Then, my dear, if you will make a hermit of yourself, would not your country house be a more attractive abode than a suit of apartments in a crowded flat?"

"Ah! you are anxious to get rid of me, Mr. Merritt," said Roma archly.

"You know better than that; but the truth is, I am off for San Francisco, on sudden and imperative business, and must go by the early train to-morrow morning, and I hate to leave you here alone. If you will not go out I would much rather know that you were with your old neighbors at Goblin Hall."

Roma glanced at Madame Marguerite, whose chair had been wheeled to one of the back windows, through which she was looking out upon the little piece of woods left standing at some little distance from the house. She seemed absorbed in thought, and gazing

rather on vacancy than on the limited landscape before her.

"Ah! I see—I see," sighed the lawyer. "You are making yourself a martyr to that poor little soul! Why not send her to the Providence Hospital?" he inquired, lowering his voice to a tone inaudible to any ears beyond Roma's.

"Because it would break her heart. Besides, when I 'introspect'—to use your own words, Mr. Merritt—I find that it gives me so much happiness to make her comfortable that there is no merit at all in my serving her; and, of course, not the least suggestion of self-sacrifice," replied Roma in the same low key.

"Well, well, my dear, as you will. I am going to church at St. John's for the Christmas service. You, I suppose, cannot leave your invalid. Good-morning. Shall see you again before I leave."

Roma's dream for her protegée was to take her to Goblin Hall as soon as the spring should open, if the invalid should be well enough to bear the journey.

The daily improvement warranted the hope. So did the words and manners of the attending physician. It is the religion of the medical doctor to inspire hope in his patient and his patient's friends, whether there be any reasonable grounds for it or not. It is one of his methods of cure.

Marguerite grew so much better that she could walk from room to room.

This improvement continued for weeks, and the invalid, who never had lost her spirits, even in her worst days, grew buoyant with anticipation of her summer holiday in the country.

"I shall like your Goblin Hall," she said; "and I know it must be haunted. I dote on a haunted house, though I never was in one in my life. I do believe in ghosts, and I don't believe one word about the name being rightly Goeberlin Hall. I believe it is really and truly Goblin Hall, so called on account of its ghost."

"Oh, it has a ghost and a haunted room," said Roma very gravely.

"There, I said so!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"And you shall occupy it, if you wish to do so." added Roma.

"Oh, no, thank you. I don't want to do that. I only want to feel that there is such a room in the old colonial house, and, when other people are with me in the evening, to hear the ghostly footsteps and voices in the distance. But I don't want to be near them and away from everybody else. Oh, no," said Marguerite, laughing and shaking her head.

Owlet looked and listened in solemn disapproval.

"What do you think about it, ma'am?" inquired Roma, to draw the child out.

"I don't like to say," she answered.

"Oh, but I insist."

"Well, then, if Tom had talked that way I should think Tom was not possessed of common sense."

"Oh!" exclaimed Roma.

"Don't mind her," pleaded Marguerite. "She don't know any better. She is such a strange child. Her mind is not right. I do think she is half an idiot."

"Oh, no, indeed, she is not. But where did she pick up that phrase she is so often repeating?"

"The Lord knows. I don't. She has had such a strange life for a child. She has never had any other children to play with—never! nor any permanent nurse; but has been changed from hand to hand as I have traveled from country to country. Don't mind the poor little devil—I beg pardon. But she is half an idiot."

Owlet fixed the speaker with her large, solemn brown eyes, but made no remark, nor did Roma; for at that instant Mr. Merritt was announced. He had just returned from his Californian trip, and his first call was upon Roma.

"Well, my dear, have you had any news?" he inquired after he had shaken hands with all in the room and had taken a seat, and Marguerite had been wheeled into the adjoining chamber.

"Not one word. I begin to credit a suggestion that you once made me—that Will Harcourt has crossed the ocean," Roma replied.

"Then I will cause advertisements to be inserted in all the leading papers in the capital cities of Europe."

"I have already done so, and am waiting results. I have another source of anxiety. I have not heard from Mrs. Harcourt since you left, and you know the reason why I cannot write to inquire."

"Yes; I will do so to-day. Hanson has not shown up in any way, I suppose?"

"No. I have seen no notice of him or his yacht since that one we both read late in November. Pray, dear friend, never mention the creature's name in my presence again. I wish to forget his existence."

"His sister, your old schoolmate and bosom friend. She was a fine girl. What of her?"

"She was not his sister, nor even his half-sister, thank heaven! He was only the stepson of her stepfather by a former marriage. Reba is traveling in Europe, and our correspondence happily suspended without any painful explanations."

"That is well. And now, my dear, I must leave you, as I have a very busy day before me," said the lawyer as he shook hands with her and withdrew.

Four days later he brought a letter from Miss Wynthrop, saying that Mrs. Harcourt's condition was unchanged, and that her mind was principally occupied with anticipations of seeing her dear son, who, as she told everybody, was pursuing his law studies in the University of Virginia, but would come and spend his Easter holidays with her.

"Evidently she has forgotten all about the marriage at which she was present, and apparently all about my existence. That may be well. But if she had only forgotten the marriage, and not forgotten me, I might still write to her, still comfort her, as the betrothed of her son," said Roma with a sigh.

"I wrote another letter by the same mail by which I wrote to Miss Wynthrop. The second letter was to Dr. Wall, the Logwood practitioner, who is attending Mrs. Harcourt, to inquire into her condition. In reply, he informs me that she is affected with softening

of the brain, that there is no hope of her recovery, though she may live for many years. It is very sad! Sadder than death!"

"Yes," sighed Roma. "Oh, if I could only go to her, or have her with me! Ah! Where is her son?"

The lawyer sighed, and shook his head in hopeless helplessness, and son after rose and took leave.

The early days of the New Year were very fine, but toward the middle of January the weather changed. A cold wave swept over the city, bringing fierce snowstorms.

Madame Marguerite felt the change, and began to cough, and complain of oppression on her chest, with fever. Her attendant physician treated her for these symptoms, and Roma nursed her tenderly.

But, as if the severe weather was not sufficiently injurious, something went wrong with the great furnace, or the pipes, it was difficult to tell which, and the rooms were imperfectly heated.

Marguerite shivered and flushed or broke into heavy perspirations.

She was too ill to be removed from the house, but Roma did all that was possible to make her comfortable. She wheeled her reclining chair up against the steam pipes on the wall and stretched a screen around it.

One morning a crisis came. Marguerite was seized with a severe fit of coughing, which resulted in hemorrhage.

Roma held the bowl and supported the fragile form until the flow ceased. Then she laid the sufferer back on the reclining chair.

"Oh—that—was—good," murmured Marguerite, very faintly; "that—was—relief."

And though she was very weak, weak almost unto death, she seemed to suffer less from oppression and difficulty of breathing.

Roma administered a restorative, and told her not to speak or move again for some time.

Then Roma looked at Owlet, who was sitting very still on the other side of the chair, holding her moth

er's hand and looking up into Roma's face with large, solemn eyes.

"Do not be distressed, my dear. It is over now," the lady said.

"Oh, I'm not. It does her good. She says it does. She had it once before, and it did her good. She said it did. Only she is so weak after it," the child replied.

It required all Roma's self-command to keep up a cheerful countenance. She knew better than the child, of course, and even better than the child's mother, what these hemorrahges meant, and what the relief they brought suggested.

From this time forward she was, if possible, even more careful, more attentive and more tender to the sufferer than ever before.

Marguerite was extremely weak in body, but not the least depressed in mind. She talked only of recovery and of going to the country.

"I feel so light," she said, "since I got relieved of all that bad blood that oppressed my chest. I shall get well now. This is only the last of January, and I shall have plenty of time to get well and strong before the first of April. And, oh, my little idiot will see the flowers burst into bloom! Do you know she was never in the country in her life, and never saw a growing rosebush, except in a pot?" So she would talk.

And as a season of mild weather ensued, she grew better, and under skillful medical treatment and tender nursing and good feeding continued to improve every day until the severe cold and high winds of early March came. Then she took cold again, no one knew how; began to cough and complain of oppression, suffocation and fever. Yet her spirits never flagged, nor did she once think of death.

"It is only another cold," she said to Roma, "but when this month is past then will come the lovely spring, and I shall be well, and go to the country. You are going on the first of April, are you not?"

"Yes, dear, if you should be well enough."

"Oh, I shall be well enough, never fear."

One day, when the doctor had made his usual morning visit, he made a slight sign to Roma that he wished to speak to her alone.

So when he had taken leave of his patient Roma followed him into the hall.

"It is my duty to tell you," he said, "that our poor young patient will not probably live out this month. If she has any frineds or relatives, they should be informed of her condition. Try to ascertain the facts without alarming her."

"Yes, I will," replied Roma.

And after the doctor had left her she stood revolving in her mind how she should proceed. She soon made up her mind, and re-entered the room.

Marguerite herself led the way up to the subject.

"It is a lovely day for the middle of March," she said faintly, as she usually now spoke.

"Yes, a very lovely day."

"If the weather keeps on like this we might soon go to Goblin Hall."

"Yes, dear. And the Hall is such a great, roomy house that I wish I could fill it up with visitors."

"Oh, no; only you and me and my poor little fool."

"I did not mean strangers, dear, but friends. Now, have you no friends or relations that you would like to have with you? I could easily invite them to come and visit you there; and it would be so pleasant, not only for you and for them, but, most of all, for me."

"How good you are! Oh! you are an angel! But, no, I have no one in the whole world belonging to me, that I know of, except my grandmother, old Madam Arbuthnot, of Arbuthnot, in Scotland; and she never saw me, nor I her. She must be over seventy years old now."

"How is it that you never saw her?"

"Oh, she cast my mother off for marrying an actor. My mother was her only child, and she cast her off for marrying my father, who was a play actor, because, you see, she was not only of a very high family, and very proud of her descent, but she was a member

of the Church of Scotland, and very strict in her religion."

"Ah!" said Roma, revolving some curious questions in her own mind, but giving them no utterance.

"My father and mother both fell into poverty, somehow or other, I never knew how, and from the time I was seven years old, and learned to dance on the stage, supported them until they died, when I was sixteen; then I went to Paris, and danced for myself until I married."

"There, do not talk any more just at present. You are tired," said Roma; and she went and brought the invalid a glass of milk punch, which the latter drank with the avidity with which she took all nourishment.

A few days later Roma obtained from her protégée the full address of Madam Arbuthnot, to be used in case of necessity.

It was:

"Madame Griselda Margaret Arbuthnot, Arbuthnot Castle, Killharrt, Caithness, Scotland."

Another severely cold spell, with high winds and driving snow.

Marguerite grew much worse. She could no longer lie down, or even recline, but sat straight up in her chair, propped and supported on all sides.

She suffered extremely from oppression, fever and suffocation, but still her spirits never fell. She never thought of death. She spoke, when she was able to speak, only of getting well and of going to the country.

One bright morning, near the end of March, she had her chair wheeled to the windows, where she could look out and see the piece of woods behind the house, and watch the first softening and swelling of the twigs of the trees before they began to burst into leaflets.

"Oh, how I shall enjoy the country!" she said, and then a terrible fit of coughing seized her. Roma hurried to her side, and not a minute too soon. The red stream of blood burst from her lips and poured into

the bowl that the lady held, until the pale sufferer sank back again on her chair, murmuring faintly:

"Oh!—that—was—such—relief. I am—ever—so much—better now"—and died.

It was so sudden at the last—so awfully sudden—that even strong Roma was stupefied by the event, and could not realize it. She set the sanguine bowl on the table and gazed at the dead form. She was aroused by the low voice of Owlet, saying:

"Mamma is better now. She is always better after one of these. It is bad to look at, but it makes her better; she always says so. She is better, really, now, is she not?" pleaded the child, looking in doubt at the changed features of her mother.

"Yes, my darling, she is better now," said Roma in a broken voice as she took the hand of Owlet to lead her away.

But the child was now gazing in terror at the face of death. She snatched her hand from Roma's clasp and flung herself upon the dead bosom, crying:

"Mamma! mamma! Oh, mamma! What is the matter now? What makes you look so? Oh, ma'am, what is the matter with my mamma? Why don't she speak to me?"

Roma lifted the child in her arms, sat down on the sofa, held her to her heart, and said:

"Your mamma is better, my darling—better than she ever was in all her life before. God has taken her now, and made her well."

"No, He hasn't! There she is, and something awful is the matter with her! Oh! let me go to my poor mamma!" sobbed the child, struggling to get out of the arms of her friend.

Roma would not coerce her; she let her go. And Owlet rushed back to the side of the dead, and began to kiss and hug and cry and call, without meeting any response.

"Oh! why don't she answer? Oh! why don't my own mamma speak to me?" wailed the child, looking up to her friend for an explanation.

"She does not answer you, my child, because she is not here."

"Why, there she is!" cried Owlet, pointing with tearful persistence to the lifeless form in the chair.

"No, darling, that is not your mamma. If it were, she would answer and caress you; but it is only the body she lived in when she was with us. But the body was poor and weak and sick and suffering, and the Lord drew her out of it and took her to a better place. Listen, darling. Your mamma is alive and well now. She is not sick any more. If my body was to be weak and sick, and more torment to me than use to anybody, the Lord would take me out of it to a better place, and make me well. Our bodies are not ourselves—they are only the things we live in; they are no more ourselves than our gloves are our hands, or our shoes are our feet. Do you understand, dear? Your mamma is not here in that body; she is well and happy in a better place. You understand?"

"Oh, yes, but I want my mamma. Oh, I want my own mamma!" the child wailed, and would not be comforted.

Roma held her again in her arms, and kissed and embraced her, and wished with all her heart that some one would come into the room. Some one presently came.

It was the doctor, on his daily visit.

"It is all over," she said in a low tone as she pointed to the dead.

"As I have been expecting to find it daily for the last week," the physician replied. Then:

"How long since?" he inquired.

"About half an hour, doctor. I am here alone with this child, and cannot leave her. Will you kindly see the proper people and send them here for the last offices? Some woman, of course, must be on hand. Please, also, see Mrs. Brown, our janitress. I must engage a large room on this flat. There are plenty of vacant rooms in the house now, since the exodus of the fourth of March. Will you kindly attend to these matters?"

"Willingly, my dear child," said Roma's old friend, who then took a clean towel from a rack, spread it over the dead face, and left the room.

Owlet sobbed herself to sleep on Roma's bosom, and then the lady tenderly lifted her, bore her into the adjoining chamber, and laid her on the bed.

An hour later an undertaker and his assistants came to the room, introduced by Mrs. Brown herself, who was really full of sympathy and helpfulness.

A large front room, on the same floor, was prepared, and there the body of Margaret Nouvellini was laid out to await the day of the funeral, which was set for the following Friday.

Late in the afternoon, Roma, leaving the child asleep on her bed, and leaving her hired assistants to air her rooms and set them in order, went down to the restaurant to get the cup of tea she so much needed.

When she returned to the upper floor she thought she would look into the chamber of death to see that all was done decently and in order.

It was a large front corner room, with high windows, whose sashes were up and Venetian blinds closed. The heat had been turned off, and the room was intensely cold, as well as half dark.

She discerned the white-sheeted form on the table, in the middle of the floor, and there also, to her surprise and sorrow, she saw little Owlet, who had drawn a chair to the side of the bier, and climbed upon it, and was resting head and arms upon her mother's cold body.

"Catherine, darling! darling! don't stay here in the cold. It is not right, dear. Let me take you away and get you something to eat," said Roma, gently taking hold of the child.

"Oh, no! Please don't touch me! I don't mind the cold. I don't want anything to eat! I want to stay here with my mamma—my own mamma!" Owlet pleaded, struggling to retain her place.

Under any other circumstances but that of the intense cold of the room, Roma would have let the child

have her way; but now she gently expostulated with her.

"It has turned bitterly cold within the last few hours, darling, and the heat is turned off the room, and all the windows are open, and you will be sick if you stay here."

"I don't mind being cold or sick! I want to stay here with mamma, poor mamma—my own dear mamma!"

"But, love, your mamma is not here; she is well and happy in a better place. But you will make her unhappy if you stay here in the cold by the body that she has left, and make yourself ill. Cannot you understand that, Catherine?"

"Oh, yes, I know! I know!" gasped and sobbed the child. "I know, but I can't help it! I can't help it! I am not possessed of common sense myself now! But I can't help it! You may take me!" she cried, holding out her arms to the lady, who lifted her, pressed her to her bosom, and bore her away.

Three days later, on Friday afternoon, the mortal remains of Marguerite Nouvellini, followed only by the officiating clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Martin; Roma, little Catherine, the lawyer and the physician, were borne to their last resting place at Oak Hill Cemetery, where, in the little Gothic chapel, the religious services were held, and Roma took the orphan home to her own heart.

As soon as the party returned to the house Roma requested her two old friends, Lawyer Merritt and Dr. Mix, to enter with her, as she wished to consult them.

They accompanied her to the parlor of her flat, where she sat down, with little Catherine on her lap, and begged them to be seated.

Then she said:

"I wish to adopt this child as my own, unless some one who has a better right should claim her."

"Oh, no!" here broke in little Catherine, clinging closely to her protectress. "No! no! no! No one but you! you! you!"

Roma pressed the child to her bosom and continued:

"At least, I shall keep her for the present, and until some one with a better right shall claim her."

"No! no! no!" again protested the child. "No one but you shall have me!"

Again Roma soothed her, and then resumed:

"What I wished to consult you about is this: There is a large, packed Saratoga trunk upstairs that belonged to this child's mother. Should I go through that trunk to obtain from it any papers that may be there—information concerning the child's relatives—or should I put a seal upon the trunk and leave it intact until it is claimed?"

"I should say," said the lawyer, "that you had better search first, and seal it afterward, if necessary. If the little one had any inheritance the Orphans' Court might appoint you her guardian and trustee; but as she seems to have nothing—but the trunk—I do not think it would be worth while to go through the formality. Since you are determined to adopt the little one, just act by her and her small effects as if she were your own."

"I agree with you," said the doctor.

"Oh, yes! I give myself to you! you! you! and to no one else!" passionately exclaimed little Catherine, clinging to her protectress.

"Very well, then, darling; I will keep you. Do not be afraid," said Roma.

Then turning to the lawyer, she added:

"I ought to tell you, perhaps, that the child has, or had, a great-grandmother, a Madam Arbuthnot, of Arbuthnot, in the Highlands of Scotland—a woman of rank, who discarded this child's grandmother more than thirty years ago, since when there seems to have been no communication at all. The old lady, if living, must be nearly eighty, I should think. Under the circumstances, ought I to write to her?"

"Yes," answered the two gentlemen simultaneously.

Then the doctor arose and took leave.

But the lawyer lingered.

"I have something to tell you," he said. I could not tell before. It is good news, my dear Roma. William Harcourt is found."

CHAPTER II

A MAN OF WOE

To RETURN to Will Harcourt, and that fifteenth of November, when, at midnight, he disappeared from the Isle of Storms.

The earth was as heavily burdened with sorrow that night as all nights. There were men and women and children starving, freezing, perishing, in garrets, in cellars, and in the streets; there were men and women and children watching the dying faces of their best beloved; there were human beings languishing in prisons, hospitals, lunatic asylums; there were criminals in condemned cells, waiting the execution of their death sentence; but perhaps the most miserable being on the face of the burdened earth on that fifteenth of November was Will Harcourt, as he turned away from the face of his beloved and confiding Roma and walked with his Evil Genius down to the water side to take the boat.

He spoke no word after leaving the house, but walked moodily, with his head hanging upon his breast and his arms down by his sides.

Hanson perceived his deep despair, and even his selfish heart was touched.

"Brace up, man! brace up!" he cried, clapping Harcourt heartily on the shoulder, as they passed through the stubble field on their way down to the boat. "You have lost Roma, to be sure, but you are not the first man ever disappointed in love; and this wisdom of the ages declares that 'there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught out of it.' You are very young yet. You will be in love, or fancy yourself in

love, with a score of women yet before you are fit to marry."

Harcourt replied never a word, but walked on like a condemned prisoner before his executioner.

"Oh, come! Pull yourself together! You have lost Roma, to be sure; but just consider what you have saved, man—your life, your liberty, your good name, your future, your ambition, your proud career, your aged mother's life and peace of mind, your betrothed bride's honor and reputation—all these that you have saved by one sacrifice, you would have lost, had you been proved a swindler, a sneak thief and a murderer. Be wise, and reflect on the things you have saved, not on the girl you have lost, and who, after your deed, must have been lost to you in any case."

Still Harcourt did not speak.

They went down to the sands, where the boat was waiting.

"Good-by! Bon voyage!" cried Hanson, gayly lifting his hat as Harcourt went slowly, mechanically into the boat and dropped upon his seat.

The men, without a word, laid themselves to their oars and rowed rapidly to the steamer that lay waiting off the coast.

She was already getting up steam, and as soon as the men and passenger boarded her, and the boat was hauled up, she started on her southern course.

There was no one on deck but the pilot, the watch, and the one passenger who had just come on board. All the rest, even the boat's crew, had turned in.

Harcourt sat in the stern of the steamer, with his eyes fixed on the dark water beneath.

The wrench of his parting with Roma lacerated his heart; the thought of his treachery toward her tortured his conscience. Was there a criminal on earth so black as he? Was there a soul in hell so miserable?

What would Roma think of him when she should come to know his deed? Truly "a deed without a name," that no law had ever forbidden, because no man or devil had ever dreamed of it!

He loathed himself and his life as he loathed death and putrefaction.

And yet it seemed to him that all he had done and all he had suffered was the work of unforeseen, irresistible destiny. He had never intended to do wrong. He had never thought it possible for him to commit one dishonorable act. He had aspired to live a perfectly upright and honorable life; to be a credit to the aged and widowed mother who had lost all on earth but him, and whose hopes in age and sorrow were centered on him; to be worthy of the noble girl who had given him her priceless heart, in his poverty and privation.

He had labored and suffered to gain an education and a profession; he had denied himself not only all the pleasures of youth, but all the comforts of life; he had worn himself out with toil and want to this end!

Then he had gone to the Isle of Storms as hotel clerk, not only to get up his strength in the bracing sea air and better living of the seaside resort, but to earn money enough to pay for his last college course.

Ah! If he could have foreseen the end of his fatal sojourn there!

He was lured into the downward path without seeing whither he was going. He was expected to be polite and obliging to the guests of the house, and he was willing and anxious to be so.

When his office duties were not pressing he was expected to join in any amusement in which he might assist, and he was delighted to do so.

For courtesy, he would take a hand at a game of cards where one was wanted to make up a party; for courtesy, he would take a glass of champagne when invited to do so, and he never dreamed of danger until destruction overtook him; never dreamed of wrong or danger until that fatal night in September when he fell into the trap of a professional gambler, and played and drank and drank and played, and drank again, until he lost his reason, and staked money that was not his own, and lost it to the gambler, who had

been scheming for that very sum from first to last of the game.

Was not that destiny? Forewritten, unforeseen, irresistible destiny?

So it seemed to the wretched youth, as, leaning over the steamer's side, gazing into the dark water of the bay, he reviewed the story.

And then he remembered his vain pleadings, with groans and tears, to the obdurate gamester to return the embezzled money, if not as a restitution, then as a loan, to be repaid with usurious interest, if it took the loser's whole life to do it.

Then, when all his prayers had been denied and derided, and the swindler had left him alone with his anguish and despair, came the mad desperation that seized him, and fired him with the thought that it would be right to try the only means in his power to recover the embezzled money—to take his pass-key and go to the swindler's room in the dead of the night, and withdraw the stolen sum from the thief's possession. And he recalled how he went on this perilous venture, and succeeded in getting back the money, when a slight noise caused him to look around, and he saw the gambler sitting up in bed and leveling a pistol at his head; how instinctively he sprang upon the would-be murderer and seized and turned his hand; how the pistol went off and shot the gambler dead!

Was not this destiny? Forewritten, unforeseen, irresistible destiny? So it seemed now to poor Harcourt in his unutterable misery.

Then passed before his mental vision his swift, instinctive action of closing up the room within and escaping through the window, which shut with a spring; the night alarm; the breaking into the room; the discovery of the dead man, with his brains blown out, and the discharged pistol in his stiffened hand; circumstantial evidence that convinced the spectators then, and the coroner's jury afterward, that the death of Yelverton had been suicide. And then, when all seemed over, and the secret of that tragedy buried

in the conscience-stricken soul of Harcourt only, came the accusation from the hidden witness, Hanson, who had seen the whole drama through a knothole in a wooden partition that divided his room from Yelverton's.

Was not this destiny? Forewritten, unforeseen, irresistible destiny? So it seemed to the doomed youth who reviewed the story.

And Hanson had demanded, as the price of his secrecy, nothing less than the hand of Harcourt's betrothed bride, and the connivance and assistance of Harcourt in obtaining it by a treacherous plot; and threatened that, in case these conditions should not be accepted, to denounce the wretched clerk as the midnight robber and murderer, to bring him to the gallows or to the State prison for life, and so to wreck the lives of the two innocent and honorable women whom he loved best on earth.

What could he do but accept the cruel, the crushing, the infernal terms offered him? he asked himself.

Was not this destiny? Forewritten, unforeseen, irresistible destiny?

So Harcourt swore to himself, before high heaven, that it was; that he could not have foreseen or prevented one step in that downward path to perdition.

He was not responsible, he said to himself, for anything that had happened; and yet he loathed himself as a wretch unfit to live. And how Roma would loathe him when she should know that he had betrayed her into the power of his rival for some unexplained reason! And what would his mother think when she should be told that through his connivance and assistance Roma Fronde had been entrapped into marrying Hanson when she thought she was marrying Harcourt? And what would all his friends think when they should hear the degrading truth? If his mother could be spared the knowledge of his dishonor he thought he could bear the contumely of all the rest of the world. If, for her own sake, she could be spared this, which could only be a less sorrow and a

less shame than his trial for robbery and murder and his death on the gallows could be.

Oh, the poor, humiliated mother! Oh, the fair, forsaken bride! He had sinned to save them both from shame and sorrow, and now he awoke, as from a dream, to find that he had not saved them after all.

For what was Roma's condition now? And what would Dorothy Harcourt's be soon.

Oh, the maddening conflict of emotion! Oh, the despairing confusion of thought! Oh, the cruel fate that had brought him to this and compelled him to live! Why could he not be annihilated? Where was the mercy of Heaven?

He looked down on the waters of the bay. They were very dark and still, and almost smooth enough to reflect the starlit sky.

"There is peace," he murmured to himself; "peace, rest and oblivion. Why should I not seek it, as a child seeks sleep? Oh, that I might sink to sleep, and sleep forever!"

For a moment the insane temptation of the suicide overshadowed him. It would be so easy, so very easy, for him to drop quietly over the steamer's side and find death and forgetfulness in the deep waters of the Chesapeake. No one would see him sink. No one would miss him until the next day. Even then no one would know but that he had got off the boat at some of the landings where she stopped to put off or take on passengers or freight. No one there would be sufficiently interested to inquire what had become of him. In fact, no one there even knew his name, or anything about him beyond the fact that he had been one of a wedding party on that trip. They were now on the broadest part of the bay. No one would ever find his body or know his fate. The opportunity was there, the temptation strong.

Roma would not care anything about the mysterious fate of the missing wretch who had entrapped her into marriage with his rival and her own once rejected suitor. Only, perhaps, she would be better

pleased to know that he had met his well deserved punishment.

But his poor, widowed old mother! She would care. Worse than sorrow for a dead son would be the torture of anxiety on account of a missing son whose fate or condition was unknowable. He was her only child, her only support, her only hope. Could he desert her in her age and destitution, and leave her with a load of intense anxiety and horrible doubt added to her burden of sorrow and poverty? Could he, dare he, bring this last and bitterest anguish upon her?

No! no! no! Hard and ignoble as life must henceforth be to him, he must bear it—bear it for fifty or sixty years to come, perhaps.

What right had he, indeed, to seek the repose of death, even if it should be repose instead of eternal retribution? He, a sinner above all sinners! Even though he felt that all he had done and all he had suffered was the work of a forewritten fate, yet none the less did he feel that he was this sinner above all sinners, with no right to repose in death, no right to comfort in life.

Yet he must live and work without hope or heart in life or labor. He must live and work, not to attain the honors he had dreamed of, longed for, aspired to, and must finally have attained but for this fatal first false step, which had precipitated him to perdition; not for these brilliant hopes that formed his "Paradise Lost," and never to be "Regained"; not as an ardent student or teacher in the schools and colleges, among the books and companions that he loved, and in the atmosphere that was his higher life! Oh, no! He had forfeited all that. He was unworthy of such companionship.

Should he dare to attempt to earn his living, and pay for his education, as a teacher of boys?

Ah, no! He must live and work as a hard laborer in some dockyard or depot, carrying heavy burdens, unfit to associate with the honest workmen who had lived worthy lives; and he would deny himself everything but the barest necessities of existence to keep

his poor old mother in the comforts of life so long as she should live.

This hard labor and hard living should be the self-inflicted "penal servitude" which he felt that he deserved, and which he knew would have been the lightest sentence for his deed which the law could have imposed, and even lighter, as it did not include imprisonment.

To devote all his hard earnings to his aged mother's benefit, and to go to see her sometimes, to cheer and console her, should be his own only comfort in his self-imposed expiation.

And he must begin this penal servitude in some city where he was not known, so that he might keep the secret of his fall from her. She must never know of his poverty, privations and hard labor. He would always contrive to appear before her, on his visits, as a gentleman—however unworthy the name—so long as she should live.

Afterward, when she should have finished her long pilgrimage on earth, and passed away to join her beloved ones gone before, then——

Then, when there should remain no one to be distressed and degraded by his crime, then he would discharge his hardened conscience of the intolerable load it bore, and give himself up to justice, to be dealt with according to law.

Not until then could he hope for peace.

At last he succeeded in marking out his future external life with sufficient clearness of outline, but his internal life was strangely distracted and confused. He felt himself to be "a sinner above all sinners," and at the same time the irresponsible victim of a chain of circumstances, the work of irresistible destiny.

So deep was his mental abstraction from all surrounding things and movements, that he knew not when the man at the wheel or the watch on deck was relieved until a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a kindly voice said:

"Young gentleman, you are looking very ill. Hadn't you better go below and turn in?"

It was the early morning watch who spoke to him, and he answered wearily:

"I thank you. Yes, I think I will."

And he rose slowly and went to his stateroom, and threw himself into the lower berth. For some time he lay awake there, intently thinking, intensely suffering, but with thought and emotion revolving still in the same circle around the tragedy—the destiny of his life. At length the body could bear no more, but succumbed to the exhaustion of many nights' vigilance, and he sank into sleep, which was at first a fitful doze and afterward a profound slumber, which lasted until noon the next day, when he awoke to find the boat at Richmond.

Oh, that awakening! Oh, the agony of returning to life, to memory and to misery, and to the revolving of thought and feeling around the destined tragedy! Living it all over again, as if he were sentenced to do so until death!

Without arranging his disordered hair or dress, he went up on deck, looking so wild and haggard that one of the deck hands remarked to another:

"That young fellow has been on a big drunk, and is paying for it now, you bet."

Harcourt had no intention of stopping in Richmond. He was too well known in the Queen City of the South. He would go to the North, and lose his identity in some large town where he had never been before.

New York City offered the largest human wilderness in which to lose himself. He had never been there in his life, and had no acquaintances there except the Bushes and that Belial, Hanson. Hanson was away, and the Bushes would not be at all likely to discover him in changed identity.

He would go to New York by the first boat.

He declined the breakfast offered him by the steward, gathered his baggage and had it transferred to the New York boat, which was getting up steam to start on her northward voyage. He sat on the deck,

staring off into vacancy, as the boat turned and steamed down the river.

"Young fellow getting over a long spree, I shouldn't wonder," remarked one passenger to another, as they noticed the pallid skin, haggard features and inflamed eyes of poor Harcourt.

He knew nothing of these comments, but sat there, gloomy and abstracted, until he was aroused by a voice near him.

"How do you do, sir?" it said.

He looked up, dazed by the sudden and familiar address from a stranger.

"You don't seem to recognize me."

Harcourt gazed for a moment longer without speaking.

"Charles Cutts, don't you know, who landed from a passing yacht at the Isle of Storms late one night in September last—a night memorable for the tragedy enacted there, you know," said the stranger.

"I — remember — you — now," Harcourt faltered, changing color from pallor to green ghastliness.

"Ah! I see that the very sight of me, calling up the memory of that night, has quite upset you, and I don't wonder," said Cutts, taking a seat beside the agitated young man.

"I—I—have not been well lately—I—I have but recently recovered from a very severe fit of illness," faltered Harcourt, in explanation.

"Been ill? Indeed, you look as if you had been, poor fellow! I am sorry for you. I ought not to have mentioned that dreadful occurrence that drove even me away from the house," said Cutts sympathetically.

And yet he went on speaking of it.

"I fled away from the scene of the so-called suicide the next morning."

"The so-called suicide," muttered Harcourt involuntarily.

"Yes; that was what they called it, you know."

"The—the—coroner's jury—after—after investigation—found it so," said Harcourt hoarsely.

"Oh, yes. Sharp fellows, that coroner's jury. I

need not have run away from them, as I did by the very boat that went to fetch the coroner."

"Did you—run away—from them?"

"Yes; for fear of being summoned as a witness. I did not want to, in the case of that scoundrel Yelverton. I knew the fellow in Baltimore. The world is well rid of him. I think so now, and thought so then. That was the reason why I hurried off in the early boat that went to fetch the coroner from Snowden, to avoid being summoned to give evidence."

"But—but—your room was—at the opposite side—of the hotel. You could have known nothing—of—of the manner of—Yelverton's death," said Harcourt, speaking as with the difficulty and hesitancy of an expiring man.

"I know it was not a suicide," said Cutts positively.

"Oh, my Lord!" exclaimed Harcourt, starting to his feet and gazing into the stolid face of the speaker, who had also risen.

"I don't wonder it upsets you. It did me, I know."

"But it was proved beyond all doubt that Yelverton died by his own hand," said the young man, trying to rally his forces.

"Bosh! Proved to the satisfaction of the Snowden Dogberries who sat on the coroner's jury! But there, young man, I have already said more than I ever intended to say to any mortal on that subject; only, you know, the sudden sight of you here on the boat recalled the whole thing to my mind."

"But, pray tell me what reason you have for supposing——" began Harcourt, but his tormentor cut him short.

"I will tell you, nor any one else, nothing. I will hold my tongue, so help me Heaven, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Harcourt.

"Unless 'in the course of human events,' as Thomas Jefferson said, some innocent man should be charged with that very murder, as may happen, for the verdict of a coroner's jury is not necessarily and invariably final. In such a case, to save the innocent, I would denounce the guilty."

"You know the guilty one, then?" faltered Harcourt.

"I have said my last word on this subject, young man, and I am sorry for having said any word about it. It is the first time; it shall be the last, except in the exigency to which I have alluded. You, too, should turn your thoughts to other matters. Exciting subjects are not good for convalescents," said Cutts, walking away to avoid further discussion of the subject.

Harcourt felt stunned. He dropped back in his chair, scarcely able to ask himself, much less answer to himself, the question, how much did Cutts really know of that night's tragedy; yet feeling sure of one thing—that the Baltimore broker had no disposition to denounce him.

And between them the subject was never mentioned during the voyage.

CHAPTER III

EXPIATION

The steamer reached New York harbor a few minutes after sunrise.

As soon as she ran alongside of her pier Harcourt came up on deck.

Charles Cutts was there, standing with two or three other passengers, waiting for the gangplank to be laid down for them to pass ashore.

"Going to stay long in New York?" inquired Cutts, coming to his side.

"I do not know yet," answered Harcourt.

"Come this way," said Cutts, lowering his voice and walking some little distance from the group.

Harcourt followed anxiously.

"Now that we are to part," said Cutts in a still lower tone, "I wish you to promise me one thing."

"What is it?" inquired Harcourt, seeing that Cutts paused and hesitated.

"Never to mention the secret I told you yesterday morning," said Cutts solemnly.

"But you told me no secret," replied Harcourt.

"Well, then, the fact that I hinted as to knowing something more about the death of that scoundrel, Yelverton, than the coroner's Dogberries ever suspected. I never mentioned the fact to any human being before. Heaven knows I don't know what in the devil possessed me to speak of it to you, unless it was because you were the first and the last and the only man, except the porter, that I spoke to on that one fatal night of my visit to the Isle of Storms. Promise me, on your word of honor, that you will not speak of it to any one until I give you leave."

"I promise on my word of honor," replied Harcourt, in amazement; for if this man had really seen the manner of the death of Yelverton by any unknown means, why should he think it necessary to bind him, Harcourt, the culprit, by a promise never to mention his knowledge?

"We may, or may not, ever meet again. In the meantime, I rely on your honor to keep your promise," said Cutts.

"You may do so," replied the young man, still dazed.

"Well, good-by."

The gangplank was down, and the passengers were going off the boat.

"Good-by," returned Harcourt, and followed the stream to the pier to begin his new life.

First he went to a barber's shop and had his handsome dark mustache shaved off, and his rather long, silken dark hair cut short.

Then he went to a tailor's and procured a rough suit of clothes, which, after trying on, he kept on, and had his traveling suit put up in a parcel, which he took under his arm.

New York shopkeepers are used to all sorts of queer customers, but they certainly did look a little curiously after this strange young man.

"An escaped lunatic, I shouldn't at all wonder," remarked the proprietor.

Harcourt went in search of cheap lodgings in the lowest and most crowded part of the city.

He saw many placards on the front of tall, dingy tenement houses with rooms to let, furnished or unfurnished, with or without board. But on inquiry he found they were rooms on crowded floors, full of bad air, and he wanted an attic or a loft, however poor and bare, that he might have the fresh air which was so needful for the preservation of his health and ability to work.

At length, after some hours' wanderings, he found what he wanted on a street near the water. It was one of the oldest houses of old New York, the basement and ground floors used for small groceries and dry goods and the upper floors as tenements. The attic, of two large rooms, each with two dormer windows, was occupied only by a poor, solitary seamstress, who lived in the front room. The back room was vacant, and bare of furniture, but, like the attic rooms of many old houses, in city as well as country, it had a small open fireplace, with cupboards on each side of the chimney, and its two dormer windows gave a fine view of New York Bay, with its picturesque headlands and islands.

Seven dollars a month, in advance, was the price of this attic room.

Harcourt paid the money, and went out to buy the cheapest furniture, in the smallest quantity that he could get on with, but not from second-hand dealers; his inherited fastidiousness shrank from the close contact of discarded household goods of whose antecedents he knew nothing.

He bought a narrow cot, a straw mattress and pillow, two sets of bed linen, two pairs of blankets and a woolen spread, a pine table, a cane chair, a tea-kettle, a coffee pot, a gridiron, and some little crockery and cutlery. All his furniture, new though it was, did not cost him more than twelve dollars.

He had this all arranged in his room before night.

Lastly, he went down to the baggage room of the

steamer, claimed his trunk, and had it brought up to his attic.

When he had paid the truckman, and shut the door upon him, he knelt down beside his trunk, and with a little chisel began to pry out the small brass-headed tacks that formed the initials of his name—W. E. H.

To the agent of whom he rented the room he had given the name of William Williams, persuading himself that the doubling of his first name and the suppression of the other could scarcely be called giving a false name.

He did not wish to take into his new life the old name. His reluctance did not come from any remnant of false pride. All that was gone now, and William Harcourt knew that labor with the pick or shovel, the hod or trowel, honestly performed, was just as honorable as labor with the pen, the pencil or the voice.

But he wished to guard against the chances of his mother's discovery of his hard life, which would certainly give her great pain and distress, and lead to questionings that could not be answered.

For the present he hoped and believed that she was enjoying a rare season of comfort and happiness in the society of Ruth Elde, at Goblin Hall, and with the prospect of several weeks of uninterrupted peace.

He did not dare to write to her just yet; nor did he think she would be uneasy at not hearing from him. She would just think that he was so much absorbed in his happiness that, knowing she was well cared for at Goblin Hall, he had delayed writing. She was not jealous or exacting, this noble Dorothy Harcourt.

Later she must know the truth—that Roma Fronde had married William Hanson and not William Harcourt; but, oh! let it be as much later as possible. How should he tell her? How should he explain his own part in that wrong? He could not think, and he told himself it was not necessary to think just now.

He had borne as much of the burden of heavy thought as he could bear without going mad.

When he had finished picking the tacks out of his

trunk, and shoved it across the bare floor into a corner, he began to feel faint from fatigue and fasting. He was also very cold, for there was no fire in the room.

He went out again, and bought a bucket of coal, a parcel of kindling wood, a box of matches, a loaf of bread, a mutton chop and a little coffee, sugar, pepper and salt.

Then he returned to his attic, kindled a fire in his rusty little grate, filled his kettle from the water spigot at the end of the hall, and cooked his frugal supper.

He had been accustomed, in his struggling college days, to wait upon himself, as we have seen, and that had in some measure prepared him for his present life. He was habitually neat, and when he had finished his meal he washed up all utensils, set his room in order, and then went to sit at one of the dormer windows to look out upon the night. A starlit sky hung over the bay, with its islands and headlands and its groves of shipping.

The hum of the city was far below him, and at this hour it was much lessened. The house was also very still. No sound was to be heard but the monotonous motion of the sewing machine worked by the seamstress in the next room. In this silence and solitude, thought overwhelmed him. Imagination conjured up the picture of Roma in her island prison, in the power of William Hanson. He could not bear this. He started up with a suppressed cry, and ran downstairs and into the crowded streets. He pushed through the crowd to get at freer space and fresher air, and went on toward the piers.

He walked rapidly up and down one of the most deserted-looking, to fatigue himself into the need of rest and the possibility of sleep. He walked for hours, until he began to feel weary; then he slackened his pace, but still walked and walked, being resolved to so exhaust his physical powers that his mental faculties might find rest in unconsciousness. He walked

up and down until from very prostration he had to stop and sit down on a pile of planks left lying there.

He had been sitting there some time, felt somewhat rested, and able to return to his lodgings, and was about to rise and retrace his steps, when his attention was attracted by the figure of a man coming toward him. The man was of low stature, slight and slim, and would have looked like a boy but for his stooping shoulders and long beard. He came on, tottering like an inebriate.

Something in his form and manner compelled Harcourt to look at him. He came on, tottering from right to left, passed Harcourt without seeing him, and went on toward the end of the pier. Harcourt, moved by some inspiration he could not understand, arose and followed him silently, closely.

When the stranger reached the end of the pier, where the water was deep, he paused, looked down profoundly, much as Harcourt himself had looked into the depth of Chesapeake Bay two nights before.

"There is peace there," the stranger murmured, using the very words that Harcourt had used under a recent similar temptation.

And then he threw up his arms for the fatal leap.

But Harcourt's swift arms were cast around him and held him back.

The would-be suicide struggled hard to release himself, but he was weak, very weak, and Harcourt, inspired by the sudden joy of saving him, held him fast.

"Let me go! Who are you that would save a tortured and maddened wretch from rest and peace?" demanded the stranger, still struggling, though now very feebly, for his poor strength was failing, and he seemed more like fainting than resisting. "Who are you? Who are you, I say?"

"Another tortured and maddened wretch, who, two nights ago, if conscience had not restrained him, would have sought rest and peace as you wish to seek them now, but would not have found them, as you would not have found them if you had taken that fatal

plunge. What is your trouble, man? Tell me. Possibly, possibly, possibly, I may be able to help you bear it. God grant that I may! Come, what is your trouble?" demanded Harcourt, setting the stranger down upon a large box, placing himself at his side, and passing his arm around the man's waist, the better to protect him from himself.

"Trouble!" cried the other. "Trouble enough! Illness all autumn. No work. Wife and children freezing, starving, in a cellar. No food for two days. Everything pawned but just enough clothes to cover our nakedness. Trouble, indeed!"

"Good Heaven! good Heaven! It is incredible! 'In a whole city full!'" exclaimed Harcourt, quoting Hood. "Come with me. The stores are not all closed yet. We will get coal and wood, and have a fire and a supper. Come!"

"I—I—— What do you mean?" demanded the dazed little man.

"'All men are brethren.' I cannot see my brother hunger or freeze while I have the means of getting him food and a fire. Come with me."

And Harcourt arose and took the man by the arm and raised him up.

The two walked from the pier.

There was a restaurant near at hand. Harcourt first took his protégé in there, ordered beefsteak and coffee, and made him eat.

"How far is your home from this place?" inquired Harcourt.

"About half a block."

"All right," said the young man. "We will have something cooked just here and take it with us as soon as it is ready."

And he ordered half a gallon of stewed oysters, a quart of strong coffee, and bread and butter for six, to be put in a hamper to be taken away.

"I don't know how many you have at home," he said, "but the order for six I judged a safe guess."

"There are three at home—my wife, son and daugh-

ter, the two last quite small children, the boy seven, the girl five," said the stranger.

"All right. You feel better now?" inquired the young man.

"Yes, much better, thanks to you; but how or when can I ever repay you?"

"You are repaying me now. I was feeling as unhappy as you yourself were when I was so blessed as to save you from suicide. I, too, feel better, much better now. I am fully repaid."

"It is good of you to lok at it in that light. But have you had trouble, too?" inquired the stranger with much feeling.

"Yes, but we will not talk of trouble now. We both feel better. Here comes the waiter with the wife's and children's supper in the hamper; let us go to them—that is, if you have finished."

"Oh, I have finished," said the stranger, pointing to the empty platters, which he had cleaned.

Harcourt paid the bill for the stranger's supper and for the contents of the hamper.

Then both arose and left the restaurant, followed by the waiter, with the hamper, who went with them to bring back the crockeryware.

The stranger led the way to a dingy tenement house with an open cellar door. The stranger dived down into this cellar, followed by his two companions.

They found themselves in a deep, murky room, with a damp flagstone floor, damp brick walls, a musty atmosphere, without furniture, without fire, and without light, except from the street gas lamp that stood directly in front of the house, and shone down into the cellar.

By its light they saw three miserable human beings —a young woman, a little boy, and a baby girl—huddled together on the damp floor, as if trying to keep each other warm.

"Come, wife, cheer up! Help has come! Here is supper for you and the children!" said the husband, taking the hamper from the waiter, who was staring

in astonishment at the party he had been called upon to serve.

"You can go back now. It is but a step to your place, and come later for the dishes—or I can send them around," said Harcourt, slipping a quarter into the waiter's hand.

"All right, sir," said the latter, now quite understanding, despite Harcourt's rough suit, that "a gentleman" had chosen to relieve a starving family.

The husband and father had hastily arranged the food on the cellar floor, and the famished wife and children had gathered around. He had put a cup of coffee in the hands of his wife, and was now giving hot milk to the two children.

It was a Rembrandt picture, seen in the glare of the street gas lamp.

"Have you no light?" inquired Harcourt.

"Light! Should we have light when we have not fire, and hadn't food until you brought it?" exclaimed the man.

"Then I will hurry out and try to get some candles and some coal before the stores are closed," said Harcourt. And away he went.

He succeeded in buying a bucket of coal, a bundle of kindlings, a box of matches, a pound of candles, and a pair of tin candlesticks.

With these he returned to his new friends, kindled a fire in the stove, lighted two candles, and placed them in the candlesticks, on the floor, and then looked around.

There was no furniture of any description in the cellar, unless a pile of ragged bedclothes, in the dryest corner, next the chimney, could be called such.

"I see what you are looking for, sir! But they are all at the pawnbroker's, every stick! And the rags would have been along with the rest if any broker would have advanced ten cents on them, to buy the children bread to-day."

"It is dreadful, my friend, dreadful! I wish I could do more for you now, but the stores are all closed. Make yourself as comfortable as you can, under the

circumstances, to-night, and to-morrow I will see you again. What is your name, by the way?"

"Adler, sir; Abel Adler."

"Mine is Williams. Good-night. You will see the hamper of dishes returned?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Thank you more than words can say," responded Adler.

"More than words can say," repeated his wife.

"Good-night! good-night!" said Harcourt hastily, and he hurried out from the cellar.

It had cost him almost as much to relieve the pressing necessities of this poor family as it had to furnish his own bare attic room, and both outlays had nearly exhausted the remains of the funds from the payment of that "old debt" which the "pious fraud" of Ruth Elde, assisted by her Joe, had invented.

Poor Harcourt did not grudge the money, but he felt that he must find work at once, or have nothing to send to his mother, when, in the course of weeks, he should write to her.

He went up to his attic, but as soon as he found himself alone there his temporary feelings of relief left him. While with Adler and his family he had really felt better, as he had said; but it was the surrounding and reflection of their happier feelings.

Now, in the solitude of his attic, remorse and despair seized him again, much on account of his share in that tragedy at the Isle of Storms, but more, far more, for that which had come of it—his black, black treachery to Roma Fronde. The first might be expiated when he should give himself up to justice to suffer the penalty of his offense; but the last—the last! How should he ever atone for the irreparable wrong done to Roma?

In the soul's utter extremity to whom can it go but to its Father in heaven?

Harcourt cast himself down prone upon the floor, and called upon the name of the Lord, not for pardon —he dared not—but for some means, through however much of suffering for himself, to atone for his sin to Roma.

"I can do nothing! nothing!" he cried. "I have fallen hopelessly into the pit! But with Thee 'all things are possible.' Thou holdest in Thine almighty hands the springs of all life and all activity. Oh, make it so that I may be sacrificed, humiliated, destroyed, for her sake, so that she may be happy!"

In his deep despair time passed unheeded. He lay face downward on the floor of his attic, sometimes giving vent to the anguish of his soul in deep groans, sometimes rolling over, but always falling into the same position, face to the floor.

So the wretched night passed, and the morning dawned and found him there.

In the midst of his misery he became conscious that some one was knocking at his door, and had been knocking for some few seconds.

"Who is there?" he called at length, as he slowly rose from the floor.

"It is I, your next neighbor. Are you ill? Can I do anything for you?" inquired a sweet voice from without.

Will Harcourt instantly opened the door, and saw in the uncertain light of the dawn a woman standing there. But whether she was young or old, pretty or plain, he could not tell.

"Oh! you are all in the dark," she said. "Let me go and bring my candle."

And she was off like a shot, before Harcourt could speak to prevent her.

But he went to his cupboard and lighted his own candle, so that when she came back with hers the darkness had fled.

By this light he saw that she was a middle-aged woman; but as middle age is a sort of "movable feast," anywhere between thirty and sixty, let us be a little more definite, and say that she was about forty, and not at all of the pale, thin, starved needlewoman and tenement-house type whom to see or hear of is so heartrending. She was plump, fair, rosy, blue-eyed and light-haired, with a cheerful and kindly expression, and she was neatly dressed in a gown of

some cheap blue woolen material and a white bib apron.

"You have been ill all night, I fear, and I am very sorry for it," she said as she set her candlestick down on the table and looked at him. "I heard you groaning just as soon as I stopped my sewing machine and could hear anything, but you ceased soon, and I didn't think much of it, but went to bed and to sleep. I always sleep like a top; but this morning, as soon as I woke up, I heard you groaning worse than ever, and I blamed myself for not attending to you last night. Now what is the matter? Tell me. I am a right good nurse and doctress, but not professional, so I don't cost my patients anything."

"You are very kind, and I truly thank you, but I am not ill in the body," replied Harcourt, with a feeble smile.

"Not in body! Then in mind. But you have not slept all night, I know, and so you are not well in body, any more than in mind. Lie down there on your bed, and I will go and make you a cup of coffee. No denial, and no thanks, please! I won't have the first, and I don't want the last," said the neighbor; and leaving her candle with the other, to make the room more cheerful, she went back to her own apartment.

Will Harcourt certainly felt soothed and comforted by the homely kindliness of his neighbor, and even supported by the motherly authority she assumed over him. He went and lay down as she had bid him do.

Soon he heard her stirring about around her stove in the next room, humming in a low tone a popular school song:

"Sing at your work, 'twill lighten
The labors of the day;
Sing at your work, 'twill brighten
The darkness of the way;
Sing at your work, though sorrow
Its lengthened shadow cast;
Joy cometh with the morrow,
And soon the night is past."

Presently she came in with a generous cup of coffee and a plate of buttered toast on a battered little black Japan waiter, the whole covered with a clean, white, well darned old napkin.

She sank down on the solitary chair beside the bed, and holding the waiter of breakfast in her lap, said:

"Now sit up and take this, while I get a good look at you."

Again, with a feeble smile, Harcourt obeyed her, took the offered cup from her hand, and while he eagerly quaffed the fragrant coffee, which he found so grateful to his parched throat and fainting frame, she regarded him with the eyes of experience.

"Yes, young man," she said gravely and tenderly, "you have seen trouble—plenty of trouble, but that is the lot of human beings. 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks to fly upward.' Ah! and if we in trouble go upward in spirit to Him who can turn our trouble to our greatest good, then it will be well with us. Everything is good that sends us to Him. But there, I am not going to preach to you. I am not wise enough nor good enough to do that. I only wanted to drop that one little hint."

"But," said Harcourt, setting down his empty cup on the waiter she still held, "if one has sinned—grievously, basely, atrociously sinned—what then? What then?"

She looked at his pale, haggard, questioning face for a few moments and then said:

"You are putting a case that is not your own, I feel sure. You are incapable of baseness or atrocity. Yet I will answer your question. If one has sinned—feels that he has so sinned—despairs because he has so sinned—still let him go to his Father in heaven. To whom else in the universe could he go?"

"To Christ."

"He is the Father. But I told you I would not preach, and I won't. I only wished to say this simple thing: Whatever your trouble may be, take it to your Saviour God. Now let me bring you another cup of coffee."

"Are you not mixing spiritual and material up very considerably?" inquired Harcourt.

"We cannot help mixing them up in this world. Were they not so mixed in the 'last supper'? Are they not mixed everywhere in this world?" said the woman as she took up the waiter and went off to her room to replenish the empty cup from the hot coffee pot on her stove.

"Thank you," said Harcourt as he received the second cup from her hands. "Thank you. But I feel like a sneak and a coward to be sitting here taking all these attentions from you and telling you nothing about myself."

"You will tell me after a while. I do not wish to force your confidence. You will find relief in telling me after a while; but not so much as you will find when you carry your burden where I told you to carry it, and where your New Testament would have told you, if you had read it."

"How do you know I don't read it?"

"Because if you did you would not be so low down. Read your New Testament. But, there, I won't preach."

Will Harcourt smiled. His neighbor so often declared she would not preach, yet she preached all the time.

She began again:

"I will give you three words: Read (the Word of God), work, pray. Now I will leave you. But call on me any time, day or night, and I will come to you."

She took up her little waiter and left the room.

"If the blessing of such a miserable wretch as myself could avail, I should bless her; but I can obey her. I will read, work and pray. But, oh! Roma! Roma! Roma! Where are you now? How are you now? Will you become reconciled to the love of that man who loved you enough to wreck his soul and my own for your sake? I must not think of it. That way, indeed, 'madness lies.' Who is my kind neighbor, I wonder? She came and ministered to me, and never told her name or asked mine. True Arabian kindness!

The janitor downstairs said that she was a poor seamstress, who worked for the ready-made clothing department of a large store in Grand Street, and that she was a most respectable woman. To me she is only my neighbor, with a little gift of preaching. Well, I must be up and doing. I must go out and look for work."

He went to the water tank and filled his pitcher, and then washed his face and hands, brushed his hair, whisked his rough suit of clothes, and went down the four flights of stairs that led to the street door.

Outside, he suddenly thought of Adler's family, and determined to go to see them before going to seek work.

But he had not walked half a block before he met Adler.

"Well," he said, "how is the wife, and how are the babies?"

"All well and happy. Had the best breakfast of a month past off what was left of last night's supper."

"I am glad to hear it," said Harcourt, and he thought how little it took to make some people happy.

"You certainly brought me luck, young boss," said the man.

"I am glad to hear that, also, if it is true; but I do not see how I could have done so."

"Why, my luck turned last night, when you picked me out of the very jaws of hell—first, in the shape of a good meal for self and wife and kids, the first of any sort we had in two days; then a good night's rest for all, which came from satisfied hunger; then a good breakfast from the fragments that remained; then, early this morning, a message from my old boss to come to work on Rue Street. My boss is in the employment of a contractor who is pulling down a row of tenement houses in Rue Street, to put up a row of fine buildings for stores. They say these houses have been condemned by the commissioners, and now they have got to go. Turn around and walk with me, boss, and I'll tell you all about it. You see, I am on my way to work, and want to get there in good time."

Harcourt turned about, and as they went on he asked his companion:

"Do you think that I could get work on that same job?"

"You, boss!" exclaimed Adler, stopping in his astonishment and gazing on the speaker.

"Yes; I am looking for a job," quietly replied Harcourt.

"You—looking for a job—of that sort?"

"Of any honest sort."

"But that is hard labor of the roughest and dirtiest —pulling down moldy and pestiferous old houses."

"No matter; I shall be glad to get it."

"Well, I am hit hard—hit harder than I ever was in my life!"

"How so?"

"Why, boss—not to be offensive—I—I—I—thought you were a gentleman and a scholar."

"Need a man be less a gentleman and a scholar because he takes any honest work he can get, rather than live in idleness and go in debt?"

"You have got me there, boss, sure as a gun. But I should think you might do better than that—might get a salesman's place in an uptown store. You would be sure to be popular among customers, with your figure and address."

"But why should I seek a salesman's situation in preference to a laborer's?"

"Well, it is nicer and cleaner, and you would be in better company."

"I do not think so; and I prefer to take work that offers itself, rather than to seek it in vain."

"Very well, young boss. Here we are," said Adler, as they turned the corner, and were at once deafened by a tremendous crash, and choked by a great enveloping grayish-white dust.

"There!" exclaimed Adler, as soon as by coughing and sneezing he had in some measure cleared his air pipes, "there! that was the plastering from some falling partition wall. It was an accident, of course. They never intended a wall to come down like that;

but you see they can't always prevent it, any more than miners can always prevent a caving in or an explosion. So you see, sir, the work is not only dirty, but dangerous."

"So much the more suited to me," muttered Harcourt under his breath.

"I hope no one was hurt by the falling of that wall," said Adler, hurrying on to the scene of destruction, closely accompanied by Harcourt. The workmen employed on the job were waiting for the cloud to clear away.

To Adler's anxious inquiries they answered that no one was hurt, no one having been near the wall when it fell. Adler inquired for his own boss, and was directed where to find him.

He went, still accompanied by Harcourt.

The "boss," a tall, hard-featured, dark-skinned man, with gray hair and beard, and clothed in a business suit, received the workman with a kindly smile, but said:

"You are an hour behind time, Adler. I shall have to dock you a quarter of a day."

"I know that, sir, and I am sorry, but couldn't help it."

Then Adler presented his friend, "Williams," and succeeded in getting him "taken on" at a dollar a day.

Then their section of work was pointed out to them, and they went together toward it.

"You see," said Adler, as they hurried on, "you see, as we are an hour behind, we are docked a quarter of a day; that is, instead of getting a dollar, we shall only get seventy-five cents. Just think of it! We work ten hours for a dollar, and if we are one hour behind they dock us the wages of two and a half. 'Tisn't the boss's fault; it's the contractor's. Boss is not a bad man himself."

So Harcourt's self-inflicted penal servitude commenced; and, indeed, it was a most severe penance to the young man.

He did not mind the muscular exertion, the painful

fatigue of back and limbs unaccustomed to hard work, but the dust, the dirt, the stench, formed a purgatory to his sensitive nerves.

That first night, when he was on his way home with Adler, he offered to lend the man money to get his goods and chattels out of pawn, and the latter thankfully accepted the help.

He went to his attic, and, first of all, took a sponge bath and changed all his clothing. He felt as if he could scarcely live and breathe until he had done that. Then he kindled his fire, cooked his chop, boiled his coffee, and ate his supper.

When he had washed up his few dishes and put them away, he snuffed his candle, lighted another, set them on the table, and sat down to read.

Through all this he had heard, and continued to hear, the monotonous thumper-thumper-thumper-thumper of his neighbor's sewing machine. She did not come near him, however, although he felt sure that she would come if he should call her, and he felt less lonesome on that account.

About ten o'clock the first fruits of his hard work began to appear, in the shape of great fatigue and drowsiness. He went to bed, and, despite mental trouble, slept soundly—slept until the movements of his neighbor about her room waked him up, only in time to get a hurried breakfast and hasten off to his work, to escape being docked a quarter of a day for losing one hour.

This is a fair sample of many days and nights spent by young Harcourt. He allowed himself no indulgences, not even a newspaper, so he never saw the advertisements for himself, nor, if he had, could he have answered them.

He determined that at the end of one month he would write to his mother, or go to see her. He thought that for one month she would be living in comfort, and even in luxury, at Goblin Hall, and that she would excuse his silence in his supposed honeymoon at the Isle of Storms. His honeymoon! Oh! Father of Mercies! was ever mortal man wounded as

he was? His mother would be in blissful ignorance of his real position. There would be no one to tell her. Hanson would not, and Roma could not. Roma would be Hanson's closely watched prisoner until he should have won her love or conquered her into submission, and then he would take her on his yacht to Europe.

Oh, the infernal thought! And the traitor who had betrayed her to this captivity! Why did not some thunderbolt from heaven fall upon his accursed head? He could not think of Roma's condition and keep his senses. He fled the subject.

He would write to his mother, or visit her at the end of the month, and he would explain, or not, as circumstances should seem to indicate.

Such was his resolution.

But before the month ended a catastrophe prevented the execution of his plans.

When the work of tearing down and clearing away the old Rue Street tenement houses was finished Harcourt, still following in the wake of his friend, Adler, got employment in the upper part of the city, where a large number of men were at work blasting rock.

He had been engaged with that gang about a week, when, at an explosion, a piece of rock struck him on the side, breaking three of his ribs and knocking him down senseless from the nervous shock.

No one knew him there but Adler, who instantly identified him.

He was carried to the nearest hospital and entered under the name of William Williams. He was supposed to be, and reported to be, a native of South Wales, his complexion and his general appearance favoring that theory.

I will not weary my reader with any details of his illness. Let it be enough to say that it was long, tedious, and very dangerous. The utmost skill and devotion of the hospital doctors and nurses only sufficed to save his life, after many weeks, as "a brand plucked from the burning."

And if his illness was long and tedious, his slow convalescence was even longer and more tedious.

Adler and his "neighbor" had been constant in their visits to him, whenever they were allowed to see him.

It was late in December when he had been stricken down. It was late in March when he was reported cured.

He was to have been discharged on Monday morning, but Adler pleaded that he might be let out on Sunday, as on that day he and another friend would be at leisure to take charge of him and see him comfortably installed in his home. Adler's plea was granted.

Adler and his neighbor both came that day to escort him home.

When he reached his attic room he found everything in good order—a fire lighted in the stove, and materials for a good dinner on hand.

"How is this?" he inquired, turning to his two friends.

"We did it," said Adler. "But I ought to tell you. Your month wanted a few days of being up when you were stricken down, so when I heard that you were not likely to be out of bed for two months to come, even if then, I took it upon myself, as your next friend, you know, to give up your room to save the rent. And as you had paid in advance, without any promise of giving warning when you wanted to leave, I had no trouble with the agent. And then I and Annie, your neighbor here, moved all your traps into her room for safe keeping. And when we heard that you were to come out this week I went and engaged the room again, and we moved your traps back and fixed it up for you, and here you are."

"Heaven bless you both," said Harcourt fervently as he sank into his chair.

"Oh, that's all right. One good turn deserves another," said Adler carelessly.

"Now, will you tell me the name of my good neighbor here, whom I have only known as my neighbor?" Harcourt asked.

"Annie Moss. I thought you knew. I thought everybody knew her. She is a widow, quite alone in the world, except for the boy brother of her late husband, who is out in Colorado somewhere, seeking his fortune, but not finding it, somehow. He never sends her anything," Adler exclaimed.

"He can't help it, poor fellow. His one dream is to strike ore some day and make a lady of his mammy, as he always calls me, though I am only his elder sister-in-law," Annie added; and then she began to prepare chicken broth for the convalescent.

Harcourt made some faint effort to prevent her, and to wait on himself, but neither Annie nor Adler would permit him to stir from his chair. When his meal was ready they drew the little table up before him.

"But you? Have you dined?" anxiously inquired Harcourt, before tasting his soup.

"Oh, I am going right away now to get my dinner with the wife and babies. Only day in the week I can do it, you know. In better quarters now, right around the corner, over the baker's shop. Will look in again to-night. Good-by. Annie'll take care of you," said Adler, and he left the room.

"And you?" said Harcourt, turning to his neighbor.

"I am going to keep you company in a bowl of this soup. That is all," said Annie, and she took a bowl and spoon from the corner cupboard, helped herself from the pot on the stove, and sat down near him.

"I am afraid I have got very much in debt," said Harcourt uneasily.

"Don't be afraid of anything. Be quiet, and rest on this blessed Sabbath day. To-morrow, when you look into your affairs, I think you will find that you are not in debt at all, except to Adler, who must have advanced a month's rent before he secured this room for you again—not that he has said anything about it, though."

"Well, I have enough to pay him, but the hospital——"

"You were in the free ward there."

Harcourt's pale face flushed crimson.

"In the pauper ward?" he murmured.

"You could not help being there. It was not your fault. Why should a man mind that, if it is not his fault?" inquired Annie.

"Why, indeed?" assented Harcourt humbly.

"Besides, if you do not like to rest under an obligation, you can, when you are able, make some donation to the hospital that may cover the cost of your treatment there. And now that you have finished your soup you must lie down and try to sleep, and I will take these things into my room and wash them up," said Annie, and she also rose and went away.

Harcourt stretched himself on his bed, but he did not go to sleep.

His mind was full of anxiety. It was now four months since that fraudulent marriage ceremony—four months since he had seen or heard from his mother or written to her.

Where was Roma now? Traveling in Europe with her husband, probably. Had she become reconciled to her lot? And what was her judgment of him? He did not dare to think.

Perhaps in the future, when his poor mother should have passed to her eternal home, and he should give himself up to justice, "to be dealt with according to law," and the whole story of his life's deep tragedy should come out, Roma might judge him leniently. But how was that poor mother, even now? How had she borne the suspense and anxiety of his mysterious silence? Did she perhaps think that he had gone abroad with his rich wife, and totally forgotten his poor mother? Or had she in some way learned the truth?

He felt that he could not write at this late date; he must go and see his mother, and find out her condition for himself.

He had saved a little money from his wages. He arose and went to his trunk to see how much that might be. He found the key hanging on the little nail

in the dark corner of the cupboard, where he had been accustomed to keep it.

Either Annie had never found it when she removed his goods from the room, or else she had replaced it, for there it hung.

He took it down, unlocked his trunk, and found and counted his money. Nineteen dollars. Enough to repay Adler the sum advanced for his rent and to bear his expenses to Logwood. Besides, there was his trunk full of costly wearing apparel that he would never want again, and might sell for a considerable sum. He would sell everything except one suit of gentleman's clothing and three changes of fine underclothing, which he would keep to wear when he should go to see his mother.

His mind was now made up.

He locked his trunk and threw himself on his bed again.

After a while his neighbor brought him a large cup of tea, which he drank gratefully.

"Now," she said, taking away the empty cup, "I will bid you good-night; but if you should want anything, call me, and I will come to you."

And with these words she went away.

Later Adler came up.

Then Harcourt told him of his wish to go and see his aged mother.

"I cannot wait to write and hear from her. I must fly to see her. I did intend to go to see her within a few days, when I was prevented by that accident that laid me up for nearly three months. I am her only son—her only child, indeed—and she is a widow. I must go and end her suspense," Harcourt explained.

"Yes, indeed, you must go," Adler assented.

Then Harcourt told his friend of his wish to dispose of his trunkful of clothing.

And Adler mentioned the name of a second-hand dealer who would give him a fair price.

"That is, as fair as ever they give. You know, whether it is a book or a coat that you want to sell second-hand, they will tell you that they will have to

sell it at half price; and to make any profit they can only give you quarter price. I will go with you there to-morrow, at the noon recess."

Harcourt thanked him, and the appointment was made.

Adler stayed with his friend until nine o'clock, and then left him, with the advice that he should go to bed.

Harcourt followed his good counsel, and retired, but could not sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

NEWS

He rose early from a restless bed, dressed, and made a cup of coffee.

Afterward he selected the clothing he meant to retain, and locked the other in his trunk.

A little after twelve o'clock Adler came in, accompanied by a dealer from Chatham Street, to whom Harcourt exhibited his trunk of wearing apparel.

The dealer looked carefully over the whole assortment, and then for a gentleman's wardrobe worth at least two hundred dollars, trunk included, offered—fifty.

This was indeed a sacrifice, and Adler loudly protested; but Harcourt was anxious to conclude the bargain and be off on his journey.

So he took the fifty dollars cash and delivered over the trunk, which the dealer agreed to send for, and did send for in the course of the afternoon.

Adler went back to his work.

"I shall start for Washington by the night train," Harcourt said, on seeing him out.

"All right; that leaves at nine-thirty. I shall drop in here to see you off. But what about your room?"

"I shall leave it just as it is, for I expect to return to it in a week or ten days' time."

"Glad to hear that," said Adler, as he hurried away.

Harcourt went back to his room and packed his traveling bag.

When all his preparations for the journey were completed Harcourt went and rapped on the door of his neighbor's room.

The monotonous thumper-thumper-thumper-thumper of the sewing machine stopped while she arose and came and opened the door.

She looked surprised and pleased at the appearance of her visitor in his genteel morning suit. It was the first time he had ever come to her door.

"I am going away for a few days, Mrs. Moss, to see my mother. Before I say good-by let me thank you again for all your great kindness to me," he said.

"I wish you would not make so much of a simple matter of duty, done with much satisfaction. But come in and sit down, and tell me all about it, if you have time," she answered.

"Thank you. I have not much time, but I would like to come in," he answered.

He followed her, and took the chair she offered.

It was a large, clean room, barely furnished with a table and four chairs, a corner cupboard, a cooking stove, a sewing machine, a chest of drawers, and a little white bed; but the neatness and cleanliness of the place could not have been surpassed.

"There is not much to tell," he said. "My mother is old—quite old, for I was her youngest born, the child of her age. I am all that she has left. I fear that my long silence in the illness has made her painfully anxious, and I think the best and soonest way to alleviate that anxiety will be to go to her at once, instead of writing."

"I think you are quite right. Indeed, you should never have left her."

"I did not willingly, but 'necessity knows no law.'"

"Ah! true. How long will you be gone?"

"Not over ten days."

"And your room?"

"Please use it yourself, whenever you like to change

the scene, and look out on the bay instead of the street," said Harcourt with a smile.

"Thank you; I will."

"And now I must say good-by. I hear Adler's step on the stairs, and he has promised to see me off," said Harcourt, rising.

"Good-by," she said, giving him her hand.

And so they parted.

Adler was waiting for him in the passage, and greeted him with a hearty "Good-evening."

Harcourt put on his ulster, his seal hat and his gloves.

Adler took up his carpetbag, and insisted on carrying it.

They walked to the Cortlandt Street ferry, which was not far off, took the boat, and in due time reached Jersey City and the depot.

"Take my advice," said Adler, as they went toward the ticket office, "'cuss the cost,' and take a sleeping car. You are not yet strong enough to sit up all night."

"But must do so, nevertheless," replied Harcourt, true to his resolution of stern self-denial.

He took his ticket, bade his friend a hasty good-night, and hurried to the train, and just boarded it as it began to move slowly out of the station.

To some constitutions the motion of the cars is a sedative, particularly at night, when darkness and drowsiness help the effect. This was the case with Harcourt in his weakened condition.

As the hours of the night passed on he dozed, dreamed, woke up, and dozed again, until at length his slumber grew deeper, and he slept until the train reached Washington, at six o'clock on that dark March morning.

He had intended to take the train immediately for West Virginia and go directly to Logwood and Lone Lodge cabin to see his mother, but on finding himself in Washington an irresistible longing seized him to go down to Snowden and get news of Roma.

Without stopping to get breakfast he hastened to

change cars, and was soon en route for Southern Maryland.

The close of the day brought him to the little seaside town.

He was known there only as the late hotel clerk, and not at all as the sometime suitor for the hand of the heiress of the Isle of Storms.

He walked from the depot to the village hotel, and entered the barroom.

The landlord, who was on duty there, instantly recognized him, and rose to greet him.

"Ah! How do you do, sir? How do you do? You are a great stranger here. And yet I have been looking for you a long time, too," he said, offering his hand, and heartily shaking that of the young man.

"Looking for me?" inquired Harcourt.

"Yes, for weeks past, I may say."

"But why?"

"Well, you know, if you remember, I am postmaster."

"I know that."

"Well, then, piles and piles of letters have come here for you, and here they are. I advertised them, all to no purpose, and on the first of next month I meant to send them to the dead-letter office."

"Where are they? Give them to me," eagerly demanded Harcourt.

The landlord took them from a pigeonhole marked H and handed them over.

"Are these all?" inquired the young man.

"Them's all," replied the landlord.

The "piles and piles" had resolved themselves into five letters.

Harcourt sat down on the first seat that offered, glanced at the dates on the postmarks, and selected the latest, as having the last news, and that was three weeks old. It had been written, at the instance of old Martha, by the hand of May Wynthrop, imploring Mr. Harcourt to come and see his mother, who was in good bodily health, but who was pining to see him.

"She was in good health three weeks ago, thank heaven! And yet she must have suffered several weeks of suspense and anxiety previous to that. I must lose no more time, but take this night's train for Logwood," Harcourt thought to himself.

He opened and read the other letters, but they were all to the same purport.

When he had finished them all he put a strong constraint upon himself, and inquired:

"Can you tell me anything about the young married couple who came down here last November to spend their honeymoon on the Isle of Storms?"

For all answer, "mine host" lifted up his head, pursed up his lips, and gave a long whistle.

"What does that mean?" inquired Harcourt.

The landlord grew very grave.

"See here, young gentleman," he said solemnly, "I don't know the rights of it, but this is certain—bride and groom quarreled and parted before they became husband and wife."

"What!" demanded Harcourt, starting to his feet.

"It is a positive fact, I do assure you. The marriage never went any further than the ceremony. The contract never went into effect. The bride swore that she was married to the man without her own knowledge or consent, and that she would never acknowledge him as her husband. Passing strange, but true as truth."

Harcourt dropped into his chair again, overwhelmed with emotion.

"Well?" he exclaimed. "Well, what next? What became of her?"

"She managed to communicate with her friends, and they came—a middle-aged gentleman and lady—and they took her off the island. The party stopped here, though I didn't know the least in the world who they were, or that the beautiful young woman was the bride, or that there was any trouble. It was long after they left here that I found out all about it."

"How did you find out at last?" inquired Harcourt.

"Through things that happened. On the very after-

noon the bride left the island with her friends one of the most terrible storms that ever visited these parts came up. That was why the party stopped here instead of going right on, as they meant to have done. Well, among other damage that the storm did, it carried away the boats and boathouses from the island, and left the people cut off from communication with the mainland and the rest of the world. But in a week or ten days after there comes a fine, fast-sailing yacht to the isle, and stays a few hours, and then sails away again. And we all here, knowing nothing about the real facts, thought the bride and groom had gone off on a cruise, probably to southern waters —coast of Florida, Gulf of Mexico, or the West Indies."

"Go on," said Harcourt eagerly.

"Well, after a while, I thought of those two poor negroes left there alone, without any means of communicating with the mainland and the rest of the world. So, on one mild day in Indian summer, I jest got Len Poole to take me in his big boat over to the island, to see after them poor niggers, who might be starving for aught I knew. People may think it was curiosity that took me, if they like, but it was not, sir, it was not. It was humanity, sir, humanity."

"I have no doubt of it," said Harcourt, who was anxious for the remainder of the story.

"Well, sir, I went, and it was from them two honest niggers that I heard the facts about that quarrel and parting. Why, they told me from the time she entered the house, a newly married bride, in her wedding dress, to the time her aunt came and took her away, she never permitted him to cross the threshold of her door. No, sir! There was a vixen for you!"

"Did the man make any opposition to her departure?" Harcourt inquired.

"No; he was not in a state so to do. Her cruelty had driven him to drink. He was dead drunk when she left with her aunt and uncle, and he didn't come to himself until the next morning, when he woke up to find that the old folks had carried off his bride and

the storm had carried off his boats so that he couldn't go after her. Then there was the loveliest little circus you ever heard of in your life. He was harlequin, clown, pantaloon, and a whole menagerie of wild beasts, all in one, and them niggers was the only audience. But the lady was gone, and the lady was safe!"

"Oh, glorious Roma! Queen! goddess! I might have known that you would deliver yourself from the power of the beast!" muttered Harcourt to himself, and he felt as if the last few months had been only a dark nightmare, from which he was now awakening. Not that even now he hoped ever to possess Roma, but—she had escaped the deep dishonor of a union with Hanson; and now such a load was lifted off Harcourt's breast, he breathed so freely; he was almost happy. Yes, though he might never see Roma again, though she could never be able to forgive him for the foulest wrong ever done to any human being; though he must remain in her memory as one guilty, degraded, accursed, still he was now almost happy, for she was free and safe. She, his queen—ah! no, not his queen! But she, the queen, the goddess, the glorious woman, who had liberated herself, was free! "Thank God! Oh, thank God!" he breathed from the depths of his heart.

"Seems like you take a great interest into this, sir. Now, if you'd like to get the facts at first hand, you can just hire a boat and go over to the island, and them niggers will tell you all about it, and take pleasure in so doing," said the landlord.

Harcourt reflected—as well as a man might reflect who was in a tumult of emotions—and then inquired:

"What time does the train pass here which connects with the Western Virginia line?"

"At eleven-fifty-five sharp."

"That will give me time to go to the isle. I will walk down to the beach and see if I can get a boat; and I should like some supper at about eleven o'clock, before I leave for West Virginia," said Harcourt.

"Oh, you go by that train, do you?"

"Yes."

"All right. You shall have supper before you go."

"Thank you," said Harcourt, with a short bow, as he left the office.

He walked down the village street until it merged into the country road that led to the water's edge.

There, after some little inquiry, he found a boatman and then a boat.

The sun had set, but the sky was very clear, and brilliant with starlight. The wind was low, and the waters were still, and all circumstances favored a safe and pleasant row to the isle, that lay, as usual, like a preadamite sea serpent, coiled on the dark, glimmering surface of the sea, some miles distant from the shore.

Harcourt took one oar and the boatman took the other. A rapid row of half an hour brought them to the isle.

"It will be cold for you to remain here. Will you come up to the house?" inquired Harcourt as he stepped ashore.

"Oh, Lord, no! I'll just fasten the boat, and walk up and down here to keep myself warm until you come back, if you won't be long," replied the boatman.

"I shall be an hour, at least. But if you feel cold, come up to the house at any time."

"All right; I will."

Harcourt stepped rapidly up the rugged face of the crest and toward the dark mass of buildings on the top. The house seemed all shut up and dark.

He walked around to the rear of the mansion, and saw one dim light shining through a low window—kitchen window, probably; but before he could approach nearer a chorus of barks from three dogs defied him, and these were instantly followed by the appearance of an old negro man at the door beside the window, and a startled voice inquiring:

"Who dar? Name o' de Lord, who is yer, an' wot do yo' want?"

"Rusalem, is that you?" inquired Harcourt, by way

of opening conversation, though he was sure of the old man's identity.

"Cose it's me! But who de name o' de Lord is yo'? Shet up, dogs! Hol' yo' jaws dar, I tell yo'! A body can't hear deirselves speak fo' yo'! Who is yo', an' wot do yo' want yere?"

"Don't you remember Will Harcourt, who was clerk here last summer?"

"W'y, sho! 'Tain't yo'! W'y, Lor's! 'Member yo'? Well, I reckon I doane 'member nobody else! Down, dogs! Stop it, can't yo'? Come in, sah. Well, Lor's! Who'd a think to see yo' here? Come on. My ole 'oman'll be moughty proud to see yo'. 'Deed will Wilet!"

Harcourt followed the old negro into the spacious kitchen, where a huge fire was burning in the open fireplace, at the lefthand corner of which sat Wilet, smoking her pipe.

"Yere, ole 'oman! Yere's a stranger come to see us! Young Marse William Harkurt, wot used to be clerkin' yere long o' dat po' w'ite trash, Tom Todd—Tom Todd! He were a proper fellah fo' a young g'eman to be clerkin' long o', or fo' 'spectable colored people to be sarvin', he were! But, Lor's! de worl's turn upside down, it is!"

Meanwhile, Wilet had risen from her seat, put down her pipe, and was courtesying to the visitor.

"Now, yo' take dis cha', yite 'fo' de fire, young ge'man. Sorry we ain't got no fire in de pa'lor fo' yo'," she said, drawing up the one comfortable seat of the room, a flag-bottomed rocker with a patchwork cushion.

"Thank you. This will do very well," said Harcourt, taking his seat, and then adding: "Now, sit down, both of you, for I wish to have a talk with you; and take your pipes. I don't object to smoke."

"Wouldn't yo' condorcent to take a pipe yo'se'f, sah? Ise got a new clay one, an' some prime bakker," said 'Rusalem politely.

"Thank you, no. I never smoke, though I do not dislike it."

"Well, den, young marse, it's a cole night, an' so I'll jes' hang my kettle ober de fire, and pit some apples down to yoast on de haff, an' 'Rusalem will get out his jug o' w'isky—it's prime, an' none o' p'ison, like Tom Todd used to sarve out to his cursemores—Tom Todd! We knows dis is prime, caze we gits it yight f'om de 'stillery, an' it 'quainted wid de 'stillerers. An' I'll make yo' de lubblies' bowl o' apple toddy, wid sugar an' spices, an' ebberyfin' 'cordin', like I use' to brew fo' ole Marse Henry Guyon an' de gemmen, o' winter nights; an' ebbery single gemman drink my apple toddy, an' praise it to de skies. Yes, sah. An' now I gwine to make some fo' yo'."

"No! no! I thank you very much, but I never drink anything of the sort. I wish to speak to you about the young couple who came here to spend their honeymoon," said Harcourt.

"Honeymoon!" echoed Wilet. "Honeymoon! Whew! Whip yo' hosses!—pepper-winegarmoon! witriolmoon! —fire-an'-brimstonemoon!" exclaimed Wilet.

"I heard in Snowden that they had parted," said Harcourt.

"Look here, young ge'man," said Wilet, "I 'members yo' come down in de boat 'long ob dem, but didn't come in, nor likewise eben speak to nobody. Yo' went yight back to de boat. But ef yo' had come in an' stayed yere—oh! I tells yo' yo'd 'a' seen a circus!"

"Tell me all about it."

"Well, seein' as yo' seems to be an intermit frien' ob de parties, I doane care ef I do," said Wilet, and she began, and told Harcourt the whole story of Roma's two days' ordeal while a captive on the Isle of Storms. She told him more than she had told the landlord of the Snowden Hotel, whom she did not recognize as a friend of the family. She told him how it was that Roma, captive, guarded, had yet managed to communicate with her friends. For Wilet, either by accident or eavesdropping, had overheard the story of the carrier pigeon, as discussed by Roma and Mr. and Mrs. Gray on the morning of her departure from the island.

"Oh, Roma! your own glorious deliverer!" said Harcourt to himself, when the story was finished. "Now I can brave and bear the very worst that fate may have in store for me. Now you are free, queen!"

He arose, and thanked Wilet for her information, gave each negro a dollar to buy "bakker," and declining their urgent offers of supper and bed, he bade them good-night, and returned to the boat, near which the boatman was walking up and down, beating his breast and sides to keep warm.

Half an hour's rapid rowing took them to the mainland.

Harcourt found his supper waiting at the hotel. He had just time to eat it, pay his bill, and catch the night train for West Virginia.

CHAPTER V

DOROTHY HARCOURT'S SECRET

It was a wild, windy, blustering night in March when the train ran into Logwood.

Will Harcourt was the only passenger who got off at that little way station, and he had no luggage but his carpetbag, which he carried in his hand.

It was but eight o'clock, yet it was quite dark, and the station was deserted by all except the ticket clerk and the night porter. There was not a vehicle of any kind on the spot, nor, indeed, if there had been would Harcourt have availed himself of the convenience.

Without even entering the station he stepped from the platform down to the country road, and set off on a brisk walk to Lone Lodge plantation.

After his harassing journey in the cars, on a zigzag, cross-country route, during which he had had to change trains several times, and twice to wait hours for the connection, he felt it as a sort of relief to walk, to stretch his limbs along a direct road, on this dark,

wintry, but bracing night. The wind was in his back, too, and rather helped than impeded his progress.

An hour's rapid walk, up and down hill, through woods, and across streams rudely bridged by logs, brought him in sight of Lone Lodge. Lights glanced between red curtains of the lower windows, showing that the family had not yet retired.

But it was not to the house of his forefathers that he was going. Before he reached the acacia avenue, leading up to the front of it, he turned to the left and followed a little path down the wooded hill that brought him to the edge of the narrow, singing stream that ran half around the hut.

He crossed it, and looked at the humble cot which had been his mother's shelter ever since the loss of their home and fortune.

There was a dim light shining through the little window of the kitchen, but none through that of his mother's room. It struck him as strange and ill-omened, and now, as he came nearer, he saw that there was something the matter with the roof of the house, he could not see what.

Full of misgiving, he went and rapped at the door.

A frightened voice answered him:

"Now, who dar? Wot yo' want dis time ob night? I got gun! 'Deed is I! I shoot! 'deed will I!"

"It is I, Martha! Open the door and let me in! How is mother?" called Harcourt impatiently.

Open flew the door, disclosing Martha's tall figure and astonished face. Before she could speak, Harcourt repeated his question:

"How—how is my mother?"

"She—she's well—dat is, toler'ble well. The Lord a-messy upon me, young marse! Who'd 'a' 'spected to see you yere to-night? Come in, honey. Come in an' warm yo'se'f," said the woman, standing aside to let him pass.

"Thank heaven, she is well! Has she retired?" inquired the young man as he entered the kitchen and threw himself into the only chair, which Martha had hastily set by the little fire of pine knots.

"Yes, sah, de ole madam is 'tire."

"Is she asleep, do you think?"

"Oh, yes, young marse—soun'."

"Then I can go in and look at her without disturbing her," said the young man, rising to pass into the other room.

"No, yo' can't, young marse! No, yo' can't, indeed, sah! Set down an' rest yo'se'f!" exclaimed the woman.

Harcourt dropped into his seat. A new fear seized him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "You say that she is well, you say that she is sound asleep! Do you mean—do you mean——"

"I mean yight wot I say, nuffin besides. De ole madam is asleep in her comfortable bed, but it ain't in dis mis'ble log house; it's in de big house wot used to was her berry own," Martha explained, in breathless haste.

Harcourt threw himself back on his chair with a sigh of relief, and then said:

"I don't understand you. You mean to say that your mistress is staying at Lone Lodge?"

"Dat's wot I mean to say, young marse."

"But still I don't understand how she should be there."

"I know yo' don't, young marse; but now ef yer let me get yer some water to wash dat dere brack ingyne smut offen yo' face, an' make yo'se'f comfor'able w'ile I hangs on a kittle an' get yo' some supper, den I'll tell yo' all about it," said Martha. And she got up and filled two large pitchers, one with hot water from a pot that stood on the hearth, and one with cold water from a pail on the shelf, and took both into the adjoining room, which had once been her mistress'.

Harcourt not unwillingly followed her, deferring his interest until after he had finished his simple toilet.

"I's got a heap to tell yo', young marse, an' dat's de trufe; but I kin tell it to yo' w'ile yo' eatin' yo' supper," said Martha, as she laid some clean, coarse towels on the rough washtable.

"Now I's gwine to hurry up dat supper," she added, as she left the room.

I don't know how it is, but the negroes of Maryland and Virginia, no matter how poor they may be in all other respects, always, or nearly always, contrive to have "something good to eat in the house."

When Harcourt had thoroughly washed and combed himself, and changed all his clothes from the resources of his carpetbag, he went into the kitchen, to find a substantial supper laid on the neat table, and a pot of fragrant tea steaming on the hearth.

"I 'pared it all yere, young marse, 'caze I didn't want to 'sturb yo' w'ile yo' was washin' an' dressin', nor likewise to keep yo' waitin' arter yo' got t'rough. Now it's all yeddy fo' yo'."

Harcourt sat down to tea, home-made bread, sweet butter, new-laid eggs and fried rashers of bacon. And if he did not do honor to Martha's cooking it was because his appetite was not yet good, and not because the supper was plain, as the poor woman insisted that it was, with many apologies.

"See, ef I'd knowed yo' was comin', young marster, I'd had some hot yoles an' fried chicken, an' cakes an' 'serves; but yo' tak' me so unawares," she said, as she removed the dishes and cleared the table.

"Indeed, I have had all I want, Martha, except the news you promised to tell me, and I am ready for that now."

"All yight, young marster. Yo' draw yo' cha' up to de fire, an' soon's ebber I fole up dis tablecloff I come an' sit down on dat little cricket an' tell yo' all about it. I's got heaps to tell yo', an' dat's de trufe," said Martha, completing her last act in setting the place in order.

Then she drew a small bench—called in her parlance a cricket, probably because of its being an humble little chimney-corner seat, and began her story.

"Yo' know dat time w'en ole mist'ess went sudden to de city?"

"Yes," sighed Harcourt.

"Well, she nebber tell me wot took her off so sud-

den. Said she'd tell me w'en she got back. But, Lor'!"

"What?"

"W'y, 'fo' she were ready to come back, my po' ole man—po' Moses—tak' sick; he did, my po' ole man did; an' w'en he t'ought he was goin' to die he got a letter writ to ole mist'ess to come home, 'caze he had somefin mighty pa'tickler to 'fess to her 'fo' he went. Yo' heerd all 'bout my po' ole man goin' to glory, o' coorse, young marster?"

"No," Harcourt replied, with a twinge of compunction, for he had forgotten even to inquire after faithful old Moses, although he might have missed him from the cabin. "I am very sorry to hear of your loss, Martha; very sorry indeed."

"An' yo' nebber year 'bout it 'fo', young marse?"

"Never."

"Now, see dat, now. W'ere yo' been all dis time, not to year 'bout it, young marse? But dere, I know yo' been off to collidge, 'way f'om eberybody, 'cept 'twas books an' sich. An' nobody to yite to yo', 'cept 'twas ole mist'ess, an' she not capable of yitin' eber since my po' ole man die. So 'ow could she tell yo'?"

"Stop!" exclaimed Harcourt, again alarmed and mystified. "Just now you said that your mistress was well. Now you say that she was incapable of writing to me. How is this?"

"Young marse, she is as well—de ole madam is—as any ageable ole lady ob her time ob life can be in body healf; but she can't settle down her min' on to yitin'; no, she can't—de ole madam can't. But she's well—well an' likewise happy; happier now 'an' she hab been since de ole marse fell in battle—de ole madam is. Yes, sah!"

"Happier! Thank heaven! But how and why should she be happier, or happy at all—the poor mother?" inquired Harcourt, more and more bewildered.

"Now, young marse, if yo' will hab patience, an' let me tell yo' a straight story, I'll tell it, an' no lie; but doane yo' jump or 'xclaim, or yo'll be sure to put me out."

"Very well; very well, Martha. Pray go on."

"Well, den, de ole madam, w'en she were wrote for by Miss Marg'et up to de big house, she come yight down, she did—de ole mist'ess did—by de night train, so she 'ribed at Logwood in de dark, lonesome hours arter midnight, an' got yere jus' 'fo' day, de ole madam did, mos' wo' out."

"Poor, dear mother! At her age, too!"

"Yes, at her age, too. It's de trufe. Well, as my po' ole man was asleep jus' den, an' we didn't wan' to wake him, fo' fear it would shorten ob his days—hours, I mean—I 'suaded ob de ole madam to go to bed, an' I gib her a cup o' tea, wid furty drops ob lodomy in it—yes, sah, did—an' I knowed wot I was a-doin' ob, fo' she was dat wo' out, an' same time dat 'cited, I knowed ef she didn't go to sleep yight off, somefin would happen to her."

"Martha!" Harcourt exclaimed, "it was a hazardous thing to do, without the doctor's orders."

"Dere want no doctor in yeach, an' de case was immigrent. 'Sides w'ich, I knowed wot to do my ownse'f, an' I did it. De ole madam didn't train me in nussin' not fo' nuffin—de ole madam didn't, 'deed didn't she. An' I gib her de sleepin' stuff on de sly, unbeknowed to herse'f, I did. An' de ole mist'ess she took it, an' went to sleep, an' slep' like a angel, she did, de ole mist'ess did, tell two o'clock in de arternoon. My po' ole man he woke up fus', my po' ole man did, and he 'quired 'bout de ole mist'ess, an' w'en he yeared as she were in de house he were satisfied, my po' ole man were; an' he waited patient till she wake up, an' had her breakfas', my po' ole man did. Young marse, if ebber Marfar Mungumbry go to de dark worl', it'll be all along ob pious lyin'," suddenly exclaimed the woman, interrupting her story.

"How so?" inquired Harcourt.

"'Caze I had to lie yight an' lef' dat day."

"But why?"

"To keep dem two po' souls quiet. W'en de ole mist'ess wake up, she say, she do, she say:

"'Is Moses 'wake yet?'

"An' I answer an' say, I do:

" 'No, ole mist'ess, my po' ole man is soun' 'sleep.'

"An' dat were lie de fus'. An' den I say:

" 'I yeckon by de time yo' get dress an' get yo' breakfas', my po' ole man will youse up.'

"Den I jus' slip 'way one minute to see how my po' ole man was gettin' on. An' dere he was moanin' to hisse'f, an' gettin' berry impatient at long las', an' sayin', as soon as ebber he see me:

" 'Is she 'wake yet? Oh, is she 'wake yet?'

"An' I say:

" 'No; she soun' 'sleep.'

" 'Caze yo' see, young marster, I wanted de ole mist'ess to get a comfor'able breakfas' fo' gwine frough any tryin' time, long ob my po' ole man. An' dat was lie de frurd. An' so I kep' on gwine f'om one to tudder, lyin' fas' as a horse could trot, 'til ole mist'ess was dress' an' had her breakfas' good."

"Well? And then?" demanded Harcourt.

"Den I tole her as my po' ole man was woke up, an' she went in to see him. An' w'en she see how low he were she look mighty 'stress, an' she say—de ole madam say:

" 'Moses,' she say, 'I'm berry sorry to see yo' sick.'

"An' she set down by his bed an' put her han' on his fo'head. An' he say—my po' ole man say:

" 'Mist'ess, I ain't wurvy fo' yo' to care 'bout me.'

"Den he say to me, he say:

" 'Marfy, chile, yo' go 'way. I got somefin to say to de madam w'ich I mus' say to herse'f alone.'

"So, young marse, I went out ob de room, an' lef' de ole mist'ess settin' by my ole man, wid her deliky han' on his fo'head. An' I went, an' 'gan fo' to make up de ole madam's bed, an' put her yoom to yights. An' all de time I was a-doin' ob it I yeard de mummerin' ob deir woices in de yudder yoom, but couldn' year wot dey was a-sayin'. An' sometimes I yeerd a moan, but didn't dare fo' to 'trude 'fo' I was called. An' arter I had done de ole madam's yoom I went an' wash up all de breakfas' t'ings an' clean up de kitchen. 'Deed, by dat time, I frought it weer time fo' dem to

call me in, 'specially as I didn't year no mo' talkin'. W'en I were done cleanin' up I went close to de do' an' listened, but couldn' year nuffin, but ebery little while a moan, like some one in deep 'stress. Well, young marse, I waited ebber so long, an' as nuffin could be yeard but dat moanin', moanin', I got 'larmed, an' I jus' peeped in' an' den I went in——"

Here suddenly the poor woman broke into a storm of sobs and tears, throwing her apron over her head, and rocking herself to and fro.

Harcourt did not attempt to comfort her. He did not know how. He could only say:

"I am very sorry for you, Martha—very sorry."

"'Tain't no use, young marster," she said, as soon as she had recovered her voice amid subsiding sobs and tears. "'Tain't a bit ob use! Me cryin' nor yo' bein' sorry; not a bit ob use in dis worl'. 'Twon't change nuffin as is past an' gone. Dere, I's done now," she added, wiping her eyes with her checked apron. "An' now I'll tell yo' wot I foun' w'en I went in dat yoom."

"Don't hurry or distress yourself, Martha," said Harcourt kindly.

"I mought 's well tell, an' be done wiv it. Well, young marse, w'en I went inter dat yoom I foun' ole mist'ess kneelin' down on he flo' by de side ob de bed, wiv her head bowed down on de quilt, an'—an'—an' my po' ole man—dead!"

Another wild burst of sobs and tears interrupted the narrative.

Harcourt could only repeat the words that rose sincerely from his heart:

"I am very, very sorry for you, poor, dear Martha."

"Dere, I didn't fink as I was gwine to 'have so bad as dis. I didn', fo' a fac'. It ain't no use, I know, but I can't help ob it, young marse. I can't, indeed," she said.

"I know it, poor soul. Don't try to tell me any more to-night," said Harcourt.

"Oh, but I mus'. Young marse, it were de ole madam wat was moanin'. My po' ole man—bress his

heart!—were pas' all dat. He were layin' dere, peaceable as a sleepin' baby. I heaved a prayer up to de Lord, an' den I jus' kiss my po' ole man, I did, an' den I took hol' ob de mist'ess' han', I did, an' she a-moanin' low, an' lif' her up an' sipport her wiv bofe arms, an' lead her out inter her own yoom, an' set her down in her own cha', an' she a-moanin' an' a-moanin'. I couldn' speak, young marse; not den I couldn'."

"I can well believe it," said Harcourt.

"No, I couldn't say nuffin. I could on'y keep on heavin' prayers out'n my heart up to de Lord. But de ole madam, she speak fus'. I doane b'liebe she knowed as my po' ole man was gone, 'caze she said, my ole mist'ess, she said, wiv her eyes up:

" 'Oh, de disg'ace, Marfar! Oh, de disg'ace as has fall on me in my ole age. I's bore sorrow an' poverty an' bereabement wivout murmurin', but dis is wuss dan all de res'. Oh, de disg'ace! disg'ace!' "

Harcourt turned very pale. What was this that his mother had heard from her dying servant? Was it—could it be that the old man had become acquainted with the secret of the Isle of Storms? And how could this have happened except through the treachery of Hanson?

"What," he faltered, "what was this secret Moses told my mother that caused her such anguish?"

"She nebber tole me, young marse, an' I had too much 'spec' fo' her to ax questions."

Harcourt wrung his hands together as they lay on his knees, and set his teeth to keep down, if possible, all utterance of the agony that tortured his heart. The next words of the woman reassured him:

"No, she nebber give no word, de ole mist'ess didn't, ob what de trubble yeally was. But she kept on sayin':

" 'Oh, de disg'ace! de disg'ace! Wot will my son say if he year ob it? Wot will my high-speeryitted, hono'ble Will say to dis dishonor as has fall on us? Wot will he say? Oh, I hope he will nebber, nebber year ob it!' "

"So," thought Harcourt, with a sigh of relief, "it is not the secret of the Crest House suicide that has been told my mother. But what can it be? What disgrace, in heaven's name, could have come to us?"

"So she kep' on moanin' an' moanin', 'til at las' she seem to take frought, an' she say, my ole mist'ess say:

" 'Po' ole Moses, he meant well; he did it all fo' me! Go to him, Marfar, an' tell him dat I freely fo'-gibs him, for I do.'

"Dat was de way, young marse, as I knowed she didn't know as my po' ole man were gone. Yo' see, arter hearin' the wuss she mus' a drop yight down by de bed w'ere I foun' her, an' kivered up her head, an' never moved 'til I come an' helped her up an' took her out, an' so she nebber knowed w'en my po' ole angel breaved his las'. He mus' 'a' 'parted berry peaceful."

Martha stopped, wiped away a few quiet tears, and resumed:

"I 'suaded my ole mist'ess to lay down, an' den I made her a cup o' tea an' gib her, an' at las' I went to my po' ole man to set long ob him an' hab my cry out, 'caze I was fillin' up an' chokin' all de time de ole madam was talkin' an' moanin', an' I didn't wan' to let out 'fo' her. Dat arternoon I did my las' dooty to my po' ole man. Dere wa'n't nobody to do nuffin dat day but me. An' ef dere'd bin frousan's, I wouldn' 'a' let anybody tech my po' ole angel but me—no, sah, I wouldn'—not 'til de man wid de coffin came, I wouldn'."

"And you were alone there with your mistress, without any help?"

"Yes, sah, 'til Mr. Silence Wyn'op come. Some ob dem w'ite folks used to come ebery day. Dey was moughty good to me w'ile my po' ole man was sick, yit' letters fo' me an' sent good fings to eat fo' him. Yes, dey did. Dat ebenin' Mr. Silence he come, an' w'en he fin' how it all was yere, he tuk all de 'sponsibility on hisse'f, young Mr. Silence did, an' had eberyfing 'tended to, he did—young Mr. Silence did—

an' my po' ole angel had as 'spectable a funeral as I could wish—yes, he had. An' he's gone to glory, 'caze he were a good angel, an' nebber frought 'bout hisse'f—no, sah, he didn't. An' he's gone to glory, an' I won't be long 'hind him—dat's wot comfo'ts me mos' ob all."

"And your mistress?" inquired Harcourt.

"Oh, w'en I tell her my po 'ole man were gone she were berry sorry—berry sorry fo' him an' berry sorry fo' me, an' moughty good she was to me; but she nebber lef' her bed, de ole madam didn'. Eben fo' de fun'al she seem perfec'ly 'x'austed, an' she did nuffin but moan an' groan, an' mutter 'bout disg'ace."

"Yet you told me in the beginning of your talk about her that she was happier now than she had been since the death of my father."

"Yes, young marster. I 'xplain 'bout dat p'esently. But dat time w'en she lay in bed, moanin' an' groanin' was las' November, an' dis is March. Dat time she did nuffin but griebe ober wot she called disg'ace an' shame, 'til I frought she would 'a' died, or loss her min', I did."

"And she never dropped a hint of the nature of the secret she had heard from Moses?"

"Nebber, young marse, f'om dat day to dis."

"Was it——" slowly began Harcourt, as his mind doubtfully and painfully reverted to the Crest House tragedy—"was it anything of recent occurrence?"

"Currants? No, young marse, 'twan't nuffin 'bout no currants, do' I did take all I wanted fo' de ole madam's jelly, out'n our ole garden up to de big house, it was wid de w'ite people's leabe; no, sah, 'twan't de currants."

"You mistake me; I mean to ask if this secret, told by Moses to his mistress, was about anything that happened lately—within the last six months, for instance?"

"Lor', no, young marse! but years an' years ago, f'om de time de ole house an' furnitur' was sold ober ole mist'ess's head to dese p'esents."

"What could it have been, this disgrace to the fam-

ily, unknown to my mother until it was revealed by Moses? Have you no idea at all of its nature, Martha?"

"Well, young marse, I has had my 'spicions, an' I's had 'em f'om de fus', an' dey's growed stronger since my po' ole man went to glory."

"What were your suspicions?"

"Well, young marse, dough I nebber breaved dem to no libin' soul, I do yeckon as I ought fo' to tell yo', seein' as yo' is de head ob de family like, arter de ole madam."

"Yes, it is certainly your duty to let me know the truth about this alleged disgrace," said Harcourt solemnly.

"Now, young marse," exclaimed Martha, firing up, "I wan' yo' to understan' one fing, fus' off, as I nebber said it were no disg'ace, an' nebber 'liebed it to be no disg'ace, an' no sin, an' no shame, an' no yong done to nobody in dis worl'. Dat's wot I nebber b'liebes it not to be."

"Then why should it have distressed my mother and hurt poor, dear old Moses' conscience?"

"W'y, Lor', Marster Will! Yo' been to collidge, an' doane know how some people's conshence—an' good people's conshence—ain't got yight good sense. Some people's conshence won't let 'em go to a dancin' party, an' some odder people's conshence won't let 'em eat meat o' Fyday! An' so it go. Now, my po' ole man's conshence had a sort o' saf'enin' ob de brain—it was dat tender. He would nebber hab done wot he did, dough it were not yong, 'cept as he 'sidered ob it, on'y fo' de ole madam's sake. Ah! he would 'a' gibben his soul as well as his body fo' de ole mist'ess's sake, wot he nebber would 'a' done to save me f'om starvin'—dough I 'peat, it was no yong, 'cept as his saf' conshence 'sidered it. He nebber did no yong in al de days ob his life. He were too good fo' dis worl', my po' ole man were, bress his heart," said Martha, again wiping away the intrusive tears.

"Yes, Moses was a good man, one of the very best I ever knew in all my life, but still that which he

did, whatever it was, was not only wrong in his eyes, but in those of his mistress, else she could not have been so distressed," said Harcourt.

"Oh, yes, she could, young marse. It was her pwide, an' her pwide had no mo' sense in it dan my ole man's conshence. Her pwide had saf'enin' ob de brain wus'n his conshence!"

"Well, but what was it? What did Moses do?" rather impatiently demanded Harcourt.

"I gwine tell yo', young marse, yight now. Yo' know w'en we-dem all lib up in de big house in de good ole time 'fo' de wah?"

"I should think so."

"Yo' was a b'y den, but still yo' muss' 'member how Moses were dinin'-yoom sarvint, an' how he had charge ob all de silber in de house."

"Oh, yes."

"Berry well, den. An' yo' 'members de time w'en de sale were?"

"I was in college then, and knew nothing of it until I came home, to find my mother turned out of house and home, and having her only shelter in this poor hut."

"So yo' was, young marse, an' so yo' did. Well, jus' 'fo' de crash come, an' w'en we fus' knowed it was comin', wot yo' fink my po' ole man did?"

"I don't know. What did he do?"

"In de dead o' night he tuk all ob de silberware—de big tea tray an' teapot an' coffee pot, an' de urn an' de sugar bowl, an' de punch bowl, an' tankards, an' goblets, an' spoons an' forks, an' sugar tongs, an' ebery singly fing, an' totes 'em up de hill inter de big woods, far f'om any yoad or paff, an' buries ob 'em in a deep hole he had dug, an' covers ob 'em up, an' covers de top ob de place wid dried leabes an' sticks an' fings, to 'ceal de new turned up yeth. Dere! dat's wot my ole man did, an' he did it fo' de ole mist'ess, not fo' hisse'f."

"Then you must have known of this act as well as suspected it."

"Look yere, young marse, I knowed 'bout dat buried

silber all de time, not as my ole man eber tol' me, fo' he didn't; but I foun' out—nebber min' how, at present, but I foun' out. But, Lor', sah, I nebber, nebber frought as dat was wot de po' ole man had on his conshence. I didn't 'sider dat to 'mount to anyfing. No, sah. It's on'y lately as I knowed it was nuffin 'tall but de buried silber."

"At the sale was no inquiry made for the silver?"

"Oh, yes, marse. One ob de men did 'quire fo' it, an' sent fo' my ole man to gib 'count ob it, an' dat stranger f'om de Norf he say to my ole man:

"'Is yo' de butler?'

"An' my ole man answer back:

"'No, sah, my name ain't Butler, nor likewise nuffin else but Moses Mungumbry, sah.'

"Den dat w'ite man f'om de Norf he laugh out loud, an' say:

"'Well, yo' de man-servant ob de house, anyway. Now, w'ere's de silber?'

"Den my ole man tell a pious frode, he did, fo' ole mist'ess's sake, an' say, he say:

"'De silber, sah? De silber hab gone de way ob all flesh, an' been sol' off little by little, long ago—long 'fo' de morgidge gib a lean on to de lan'. Yes, sah, it went to pay debts, an' to buy sugar an' tea an' sperrets fo' de ole madam.'"

"Where was your mistress when this conversation took place?"

"Her had come to dis cabin airley in de mornin', 'fo' dem furriners f'om de Norf come, her had. She didn't wan' to see 'em."

"Oh, yes—of course. I might have known she was not there. She might have been questioned, and she would surely have contradicted Moses, and insisted on the silver being produced."

"Oh, yes; so she would. Dem w'ite men f'om de Norf knowed dat, too, 'caze dey ax w'ere she war; an' my ole man sweared his soul to Satan as she had gone to Washington city on a visit to de Presiden'. An' den dey tackled me, an' cross-question ob me like a murder trial. But dey didn' get nuffin out'n me—

no, sah! I were a better han' at pi'us frodes dan my ole man, an' I sweared my soul to partition as all de silber had been sol' fo' 'visions in de wah, an' I didn' fink no harm o' tellin' pi'us frodes to dem heethun fo' my ole mist'ess's sake. My conshence has got good sense, it has. Well, dey s'arched up, an' dey s'arched down, but, Lor', dey couldn' fin' nuffin. An' wa'n't I glad! An' me an' my ole man look at one anodder, an' he look werry onhappy. His conshence wa'n't sensible."

Harcourt said nothing to try to enlighten Martha's mind on this subject. He knew it would be of no earthly use.

After a pause Martha resumed:

"Well, sah, w'en eberyt'ing got settled down, an' de Wyn'ops bought de ole house an' lan', an' mos' ob de furnitur', an' we was tryin' to make ole mist'ess comfo'table in de cabin——"

"Why didn't you get somebody to write to me?" Harcourt interrupted.

"Ole mist'ess wouldn' year to it. She say, ole mist'ess say, yo' wasn' to know nuffin 'tall 'bout de sale, fear yo'd come yunnin' yere 'fo' yo' tarm was out. She yighted letters to yo' ebery week, didn't she? I knowed she sent letters to de pos' office at Logwood ebery free four days by my ole man."

"Yes, she wrote to me, but she never told me of the change; nor did I hear of it until I came home that summer vacation. But go on."

"I was gwine to say, young marse, ef it hadn't been fo' dat hidden silber, ole mist'ess would 'a' suffered want. Yes, sah, she would! My po' ole man were 'ployed cart drivin' fo' de Wyn'ops, but dough dey paid well, de work wa'n't stiddy, an' it wa'n't 'nough to keep ole mist'ess in comforts. So de silber was took out'n its hole, little by little, in de dead ob night, an' sol' to buy 'visions."

"How did Moses manage to dispose of it without detection?"

"Oh, easy. My ole man had been sent two or free times wid a pass f'om ole mist'ess, to sell a silber

goblet or tankard, or sumfin, to a silbersmiff wot she knowed in Wichmon', an' de silbersmiff knowed my ole man was her faifful, trus'ful sarvan', an' he was used to dealin' long ob him, an' so po' ole Moses had no trubble. He nebber telled me; but, Lor'! I could see frough it all. He used to take a night, an' go an' get a silber teapot or sumfin out'n de hole in de woods, an' den he'd take a day an' yide to Wichmon' in de steam keers, an' sell de fing, woteber it mought be, to dat silbersmiff wot knowed him, an' knowed ole mist'ess; and I don't b'liebe dat silbersmiff nebber fought dat ole mist'ess nebber sent dat silber to be sol', like she had sent de odder. An' so we kep' de ole madam in comfo't, wid de bes' ob tea an' coffee an' w'ite sugar an' pote wine an' F'ench b'andy, an' eberyt'ing she wan' to eat an' d'ink."

"Then that is the secret which Moses on his death-bed told my mother?"

"Yes, young marster, dat must 'a' been it, 'caze dere wan' nuffin else fo' to tell. 'Sides w'ich, I knowed it prayed on to his po' ole min', 'caze he use to talk in his sleep 'bout it. Dat 'firmed me in my 'spicions. An', young marse, de ole madam ain't been herse'f—not jes' her own se'f, ebber since."

"Poor mother! Poor lady! But you said she was happy now. How comes that? And how comes it, also, that she is at Lone Lodge on a visit?"

"She ain't dere on a wisit, young marse. She is dere at home, perminicy, an' dat wot it is make her so happy."

"What! What is this you tell me? That my mother, my proud, high-spirited mother, stoops to be dependent on the Wynthrops for a home? And is even happy in such dependence?" exclaimed Harcourt, in humiliated and indignant amazement.

"Now, youg marse, sah, doane yo' go off at sich a tanger! Let me 'xplain. De ole madam kep' on griebin' an' griebin' 'bout dat disg'ace, as she call it, till she got yight down weak an' low——"

"Poor lady! poor lady!" murmured Harcourt in a low tone.

"An' so it went on 'til one night dere comed up de awfulles' win' storm as ebber yo' saw in all de days ob yo' life! An' yo'd fink de hills yere would 'a' 'tected us, but dey didn' much, 'caze dat win' swurl in at de low en' ob de walley an' up to de high en', fo' all de worl' like de draft ob one of dem stobes dey Wyn'ops got up at de big house. We didn't go to bed dat night, an' well we didn', de ole madam an' me, fo' in de middle ob de night de win' come whurlin' up de walley an' twissed de ruff yight off de top ob de cabin an' whurled it up to de odder en' ob de walley, an' hev it down. An' we was unruffed in de middle ob de night."

Harcourt shuddered.

"What did my poor mother do?" he inquired.

"Nuffin. She couldn' do nuffin. I made her a narrow bed out ob bolsters an' pillows on de flo', an' put her on it, an' kivered her up, an' den tuk de big kitchen table an' stood it up ober her, an' hung quilts an' blankets ober dat to keep off de win' an' de rain, wot soon poured down like No's flood. Oh, young marse, dat was de wus' night I ebber see in all my life."

"And your poor mistress?"

"Oh, young marse, next mornin' de sto'm was ober, an' de sun shinin' an' smilin', good-natured as a angel, on to our wracked an' ruinated home. An' 'deed anybody not intrusted mought even 'a' laughed—de place did look dat queer, wid eberyt'ing all yight, 'cept 'twas de ruff off, an' de yooms all open to de sky, an' po' ole mist'ess tucked up unnerneaf ob de table."

"I should think it was no laughing matter," said Harcourt, in grave rebuke.

"No mo' it wa'n't, young marse—'deed wa'n't it! De po' ole mist'ess was berry ill—in a high feber—doane be scared, young marse! Yo' know, I telled yo' she were well an' happy now."

"Go on," was all that Harcourt found it possible to say."

"I didn't know wot to do. I was 'fraid to leabe ole mist'ess, an' 'fraid not to run fo' 'sistance. Anyway, dem Wyn'ops up to de big house was lookin' out wid

a spyglass at de damage done by dat darnado, an' dey see de ruff offen our cabin, an' dey sent young Mr. Silence down yere to see arter us. Oh, young marse, dem Norfen furriners is good people, fo' w'en dey see de trouble we was in, an' de ole mist'ess in a high feber, an' 'tirely out'n her head, they sent a kivered wagon down yere an' had her lif' into it, bed an' all, an' dey carry her up to de big house, an' tell me to come along, too, till de ruff was put on de cabin again. An' dat was de way de ole mist'ess come to be up at de big house as was once her own home—not, as I bliebe she would ebber hab gone inter dat house ef she hadn't been out'n her head."

"No, I am sure she would not," sighed poor Harcourt.

"But I mus' say it was a bressed fing as she did go, young marse. It saved her life. An' w'ere does yo' fink dey put de ole madam?"

"In the back building, or in the garret?"

"No, sah! Dey put her in bed in her own bressed ole yoom—de parlor bedyoom, w'at opens offen de drawin'-yoom on one side an' de back piazza on de t'oder! Yes, sah, dey put her dere, an' it were jus' as she lef' it free years ago. Same flowered chintz bed curt'ins, an' same windy curt'ins. Yes, an' same rag carpet as I helped to make myself! Same corner cupboard, an' same armchair wid same patchwork cushions on it. Yes, sah, it were. An' dey put de ole madam in it, jus' de same as if she had nebber lef' it. Yes, sah, I did ax Miss Mar'get, wot is a werry nice young w'ite gal, how it war, an' she tell me her mudder like dat yoom so w'en she fus' see it she wouldn' hab nuffin change' into it, but kep' it for comp'ny jus' so. An' dey put ole mist'ess inter it. Now wot does yo' fink ob dat fo' de Wyn'ops?"

"It was very, very kind; still, I don't like it."

"W'y? Yo' ought ter like it, young marse. Yo' oughtn' ter let pwide come in yere. An' dey sent fo' Dr. Wall to 'tend her, and arterward Dr. Lat'rop, f'om Logwood. An' dere war me s'eepin' on a little mattrass on de flo' 'fo' de fire, like I used to do w'enebber

de ole madam was poorly, an' wanted ob me. Oh, it war like de good ole times, it war! An' de ole madam got perfec'ly well an' happy—well, dat is 'cept fo' one 'lusion she has on to her min'."

"Delusion?" inquired Harcourt uneasily.

"Yes, sah. Dat's wot de Wyn'ops call it—'lusion. An' it's dat 'lusion wot makes her so happy."

"What is it?" demanded Harcourt anxiously.

"Oh, young marse! I can't help larfing an' cryin' bofe w'en I fink ob it. Dat feber ob hers it wipe out all de sorrows an' sufferin's as my ole mist'ess eber had in her life. It wipe out de bloody wah, an' de deaf ob de ole marse, an 'de young ge'man an' young ladies, an' de sale ob de house an' lan', an' de po' libin' in de log cabin, an' eberyt'ing. W'en ole mist'ess come out ob dat feber, an' wake up in her ole yoom, she t'ought how she had nebber lef' it. She t'ought de ole marse an' de young chillun was all libin', an'—an' she t'ought dat all de Wyn'ops in de house war her own comp'ny."

"Insane! Oh, my poor mother!" groaned Harcourt.

"Doane take it dat way, young marse! De ole madam is sensible as a judge in eberyt'ing else but dat 'lusion, an' dat 'lusion do make her so happy yo' oughtn' ter begrudge it to her. An' de Wyn'ops, dey do humor her into it, an' dey tell me ebery day not fo' de worl' to counterdick her."

"But that she should be living in dependence on these people!"

"'Tain't quite dat, neider, young marse. Dere's money comes ter her ebery once in a w'ile—f'om some 'un or odder who owed ole marse a debt. It come frough some laayer, in de care ob Miss Mar'get, an' she do lay it out fo' de ole madam. I know she pay de two doctah's bills an' bought fings wid it."

"Oh, yes," said Harcourt. "I believe I did hear from mother that there was an old debt owed her which was to be paid by installments. But if mother stays there I must pay her board. If the people won't take pay she must come away."

"No, she mus'n', 'deed, young marster. It would

kill her. 'Sides w'ich, I doane b'liebe dese sens'ble Norvun people would 'ject to yo' payin' bo'd fo' her. Dey ain't got none ob dat nasty se'fish pwide wot won't take no 'sideration on ter nobody e'se's pwoper pwide. No, sah! Now, young marse, p'ease tell me wot o'clock it is. It mus' be gettin' moughty late."

"I have no watch, Martha, but I should judge it to be about ten o'clock."

"See dat now! I mus' go back ter ole mist'ess. I s'eeps in her yoom ebery night, to take care ob her. I does fo' her all day, too, dough I keeps on dis ole cabin to keep my fings in; an' young marse, I kin mak' yo' mons'ous comfo'ble in de oder yoom, w'ere ole mist'ess used to s'eep, ef yo' doane min' s'eepin' yere ter-night. De ruff doane let in no water, eben if de rain come, dough it is men'ed moughty rough."

"I shall sleep here, if you please, so long as I stay in the neighborhood."

"All yight, young marse. I'll do de bes' I kin fo' yo'."

Martha went into the other room, made the bed, laid out towels, and filled the pitcher with fresh water.

Then she returned, and said:

"Now, young marse, yo'll be comfo'ble fo' de night, an' airly ter-morrer mornin', fo' ole mist'ess wake up, I'll yun down yere an' git yo' breakfas' yeddy. Good-night, young marse."

"Good-night. But how will you get into the house without disturbing the family?"

"Oh, I got de key ob de ole mist'ess's yoom, wot open on de piazza. I allers comes in an' out ob dat do', an' not de one wot opens on to de parlor. Good-night, sah."

When Martha had left the cabin Harcourt started up and followed her.

"Wot de matter, young marse?" she inquired, turning back when she heard him.

"Do not tell your mistress that I have returned. Wait until I go to the house."

"Course I won't, young marse. It would mak' her

too res'less 'til she seed yo'," answered Martha, and she turned again and hurried up the hill.

Harcourt stood looking around him on the night scene, and meditating on all that he had heard.

The March wind was still blowing, driving ragged black clouds across the expanse of sky above, and swaying the pine trees on the top of the hills around.

Was he glad or sorry that his mother was an honored guest at Lone Lodge, humored in the delusion that repossessed her of all her lost treasures of husband and children, home and wealth, and made her completely happy?

He found it impossible to answer that question until he should have seen and talked with Dorothy Harcourt.

But of one other circumstance he was deeply glad and grateful—that Roma was free! Come what might to himself now, Roma was free!

He wondered whether Martha or any of the people at Lone Lodge or at Logwood knew anything about the motive of his mother's sudden journey to Washington city, when she went to attend his hasty marriage, or whether any of them knew anything about the ceremony that had been performed at the little church at the dawn of day, or even anything about his engagement to Roma Fronde. He had been anxious to ascertain, but could not, even indirectly, ask the question; for if Martha knew nothing about the circumstances such inquiry would start speculation, if it did not give information.

He thought, on the whole, that no one in the neighborhood knew anything about the matter. His mother was proud and reserved, and would not be likely, under her circumstances, to speak of family affairs to any one there, and so she had gone to Washington city without telling any one why she went there.

On her return she might have told Martha, had not the exigent and exciting events that met her in the cabin delayed the communication until she was prostrated by the severe fever that burned all memory of recent events out of her brain.

True, the letters that he had received with partial news of his mother were all directed to Snowden, which would seem to prove that the writer, Margaret Wynthrop, had reason to suppose that he was at the Isle of Storms, where he was believed to have gone to spend his honeymoon with Roma Fronde. Yet no mention of Roma Fronde—no allusion to his supposed marriage, occurred in any of the letters. Possibly, Margaret Wynthrop had directed his letters there as to the place of the last address she knew of when he was clerk of the Crest House. Yes, that must have been the reason. And she knew nothing of his marriage; and his mother, in her happy delusion, had forgotten it, with everything else that had happened in the last few years. Still, he could not feel quite certain of his theories until he should have seen his mother and met the Wynthrops.

At least one thing seemed assured—that he would be asked no questions about his lost Roma, and that would relieve him from much dreaded embarrassment. He would have no bitter, grievous explanations to make, or invent, for the absence of his supposed bride; no deception, justifiable or otherwise, to practice upon his aged mother, no new sin, the necessary outcome of the old sin, to burden his conscience. His aged mother was happy in a paradise of illusions. Before long she would leave that for a heaven of realities. When that time should come, and she should be safe beyond the possibility of knowing or sharing his shame and agony, he would give himself up to justice for his share in the tragedy at the Crest House, and he would tell Roma of the dire need, the infernal scourge of fire, that had driven him to wrong her as he had done. She would forgive him, and he would meet his fate in State prison or on the scaffold, whichever it might be, with more patience and fortitude than he possessed now in bearing the weight of memory and remorse.

It would be a dark ending of all his bright aspirations for the honor of this world, but then he had done with this world—and there was another—a world

free from temptation and sin, full of love and faith; there he should meet again all whom he had loved and lost, and best of all—Roma! And nothing would be between them.

While he walked slowly up and down the little, narrow space between the cabin and the stream, meditating on the troubled past and threatening future, the wind had gradually cleared the sky overhead and had sunk into rest. The pine trees stood still, the stars shone out, all was quiet.

"The storm clouds are breaking—a little, a little—even for me,' he said. "But it will never be clear in this world."

He turned and went into the cabin.

He found the room once occupied by his mother very comfortably arranged for his accommodation. A good fire was blazing in the chimney, and on the hearth before it was a pitcher of chocolate kept warm for him.

He drank its contents gratefully and went to rest.

CHAPTER VI

HARCOURT AT LONE LODGE

The profound quiet of the little vale, the soothing tinkle of the little stream, lulled the wearied traveler into a slumber so deep and prolonged that the sun was high above before he woke.

Then it took him a few minutes to collect his faculties and realize his position. He looked with something like a faint content on the humble, peaceful scene around him. He lay for a little while in a sort of restful trance, and then suddenly remembered all that he had heard from Martha on the previous night about his mother's state, and he sprang out of bed and dressed in haste, so that he might the sooner see that beloved parent and judge for himself of her condition.

When he had hurried through his plain toilet he opened his room door and crossed the narrow passage into the kitchen.

There he found no one present, though every preparation was completed for his breakfast.

There was a glorious wood fire in the wide, open chimney, and bright tin-covered dishes sitting on the stone hearth before it; a pine table laid with a fine, white, well darned damask cloth—a vestige of better days at Lone Lodge, like the rare and costly, but chipped and mismatched old china that adorned it.

Harcourt understood the situation.

Martha, true to her word, had come very early in the morning, before her mistress would be likely to wake and want her services, and finding that her young master still slept, she had forborne to disturb him, but had gone quietly to work to prepare his morning meal, which she had placed before the fire to be kept hot until he should rise and require it, while she herself hurried back to Lone Lodge to attend upon her mistress.

Harcourt placed his breakfast on the table and sat down to it.

While he was slowly sipping his coffee he heard rapid, scuffling footsteps tearing through the brushwood toward the cabin, and the next moment the door was pushed open and Martha ran in.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, out of breath, and stopping short on seeing Harcourt. "So yo's up, young marse. Hopes yo' had a good night's rest, sah."

"The best I have had for many a day, Martha, thank you," he replied.

"See dat now! Comin' home, dat's wot it is; natyve air, an' dat. 'Scuse me, young marse, an' let me sit down, wiv yo' 'mission. I's sort o' out o' breaf, yunnin' so fas'," panted the woman.

"Certainly, good Martha; make yourself comfortable."

"Hopes yo' fin's yo' breakfas' good an' yelishin', young marse," said the cook, as she modestly sat down on the cricket.

"The best breakfast, as well as the best night's rest, I have had for many a day. Your coffee and your butter and your rolls cannot be surpassed," said Harcourt heartily.

"P'oud ter hear yo' say so, sah—but," she inquired, dubiously, and ravenous for praise, like all her race, "anyfing de matter wid de ham or de hominy or de sweet taters, or de fr'ed chicken?"

"Why, no. They are all delicious—perfectly delicious."

"Moughty p'oud ter year yo' say so, sah, moughty p'oud."

"But, Martha, I have been longing to ask you how is your mistress? Well, this morning, I hope, by your manner?"

"P'opper well, sah. Peert as pussy, de ole madam is."

"You did not tell her that I had come?"

"Hi! young marse, who yo' fink is a fool? Not me! No, sah, I didn't tell de ole madam, who was as'eep up yere in de log house. If I had, dere wouldn' been no holdin' her back, no, sah. She'd 'a' t'ied to walk down herse'f."

"My poor, dear mother! How soon now can I see her, I wonder?"

"Soon's ebber yo' like, sah. De ole madam hab finis' her breakfas'—an' doane she yeat hearty? Umph! umph! It would do yo' good ter see her," said Martha, smacking her own lips in gastronomic sympathy.

Harcourt was not pleased to be told this. He had heard that abnormal appetite often attended cases of softening of the brain.

"An' now," continued Martha, "she is sot down to her stockin' an' ball o' yarn, an' she knittin' away like a cherrybim. Yo' can go see her soon's ebber yo's done yo' breakfas'."

"I have done my breakfast, and I will go at once," said Harcourt; and he arose quickly and hurried into the bedroom to get his overcoat—the handsome one he had worn on his defeated wedding tour, and had

carefully preserved that he might appear well dressed in the presence of his mother.

"Wan' me ter go long o' yo', young marse?" inquired Martha when he re-entered the kitchen, ready for his walk.

"Yes; I wish you to go before me to your mistress, and tell her I am there—close by. I do not wish to take her quite by surprise. And besides, as a matter of imperative courtesy, I must present myself to her kind hostess on first going to the house."

"Sartin, young marse; dat is true. An' 'deed, dey's all been moughty good to de ole madam—Lor' knows dey has—moughty good," said Martha, as she wrapped her tall figure in a large black shawl and put a quilted black silk hood on her head, for the walk with the young master. They left the cabin together, Martha just closing the door, which had neither lock nor bolt, only a light latch to keep it shut in windy weather, for there were no thieves on this old plantation, and the cabin was remote from thoroughfares.

Up the little, narrow, almost invisible footpath over the wooded hill they went until they came in view of Lone Lodge, a large, rambling, picturesque old farmhouse, built partly of gray stone, partly of red bricks, and partly of wood. It consisted of three distinct houses, the growth of generations, and was joined together after a fashion, or rather after no fashion at all. The oldest and rudest part of the building was also the strongest and quaintest; but the later structures were in a good state of preservation. There were broad piazzas front and back, both roofed over, and there were porticoes, balconies and bay windows stuck on here and there, up and down the wall at each gable end. The roofs of the buildings were of different heights and shapes—the old colonial house had a high, peaked roof, with dormer windows; the middle edifice, built just after the close of the Revolutionary War, had a hip roof, with two rows of tiny windows; while the third building had a Mansard, with its beautiful lights and trimmings.

Opening on the front piazza there were three doors, leading into the three divisions of the triune house.

Harcourt went up to the central door and knocked, while Martha scuttled around to the rear to warn her mistress of her son's near presence.

After some little delay the door was opened by Margaret Wynthrop.

"Oh! Mr. Harcourt! How do you do? I am very glad to see you! Mrs. Harcourt will be overjoyed," she said cordially.

"I am here to thank you for your great goodness to my dear mother, though mere thanks, however earnest and heartfelt, are but a poor return for such goodness," said the young man, with much emotion.

"Oh, indeed!" earnestly responded the girl, "it has been a real satisfaction to us all to be permitted to alleviate in some degree the troubles of this lady. But pray come in."

He followed into the old familiar hall, with its broad horsehair sofa and straight-backed chairs and frescoed pictures above them, with its oaken doors on either side, and its well-worn staircase in the center.

"There is no fire in the big parlor. Come in here," she said, and she opened a door on the left leading into the family sitting-room, where Mrs. Wynthrop and her second daughter, Elizabeth, were seated at work.

The elder lady was cutting and basting on a lapboard. The younger one was thumping away at a sewing machine.

Both arose and left their seats to welcome the visitor.

"We are very happy to see you, Mr. Harcourt. This is my daughter Betty. I think you have never met her before. Betty, dear, this is Mrs. Harcourt's son," said Mrs. Wynthrop, cordially shaking hands with the visitor, and presenting him to her younger daughter.

The young man bowed to the young girl, who

seemed in face and form only a fairer and more delicate repetition of her mother and elder sister.

"Take this armchair in the chimney corner, Mr. Harcourt," said Margaret. "But take off your overcoat first. Frankly, you are not looking in good health. You must be careful of yourself at this season of the year, when the changes are so sudden.

Harcourt thanked his counselor, and obeyed her.

When he was seated he again expressed his warm gratitude to Mrs. Wynthrop for her kindness to his aged and infirm mother.

Mrs. Wynthrop, in turn, assured him of the pleasure she and all her family had taken in doing all that they had been able to do for Mrs. Harcourt.

"And the house is so large. We have so much space. Why, you know, of course, that we have three distinct garrets, one over each part of this threefold house. The two largest I had made into bedrooms for the boys. They made four rooms. The smaller—which, by the way, is large enough in all conscience—I keep for our lumber room."

"Our 'chamber of desolation,' I call it, Mr. Harcourt," said Betty.

"Every house must have its 'chamber of desolation,'" added Mrs. Wynthrop, "but really, I think the empty rooms are the most desolate of all. They are like bodies without souls. And now that my three youngest girls are at school at Northampton, two of the younger lads at college, and two of the elder boys have gone into the dry goods business in Washington city, the old house is more than half unoccupied."

"I proposed to mamma to take summer boarders this season," said Margaret with a light laugh.

And in this seeming jest the girl had a serious and benevolent purpose.

She felt how necessary it was that the aged gentlewoman should remain in peaceable possession of her room and her illusions; and she knew enough of the morbid pride and sensitiveness of the family to feel that young Harcourt could never bend his spirit to leave his infirm mother a dependent on their hospi-

tality; and also that he—judging them by himself—would hesitate to propose to pay board for her, lest he should give offense.

Feeling and knowing all this, the kind-hearted and practical girl prepared his way with a jest.

Without suspecting her humane purpose, he followed immediately where she wished to lead, and said, still with some faltering:

"I wish—oh! I do wish—it would be such a blessing to my dear mother—that you would take her as a permanent boarder."

"Mrs. Harcourt is most welcome to us. She will always be welcome, either as a visitor or boarder, whichever you please, and just as long as she likes. She is so happy here in her old home," said Mrs. Wynthrop pleasantly.

"Yes, she is very happy here in her old home, and in the delusion that it has never ceased to be her home," said Harcourt.

"And it would be a great pity to disturb her in that delusion," added the lady.

"Ah! I understand you, madam, and I thank you more than words can convey. So long as I live——"

Whatever the young man was going to add was cut short by a rap, followed by the entrance of Martha, who dropped her old-fashioned courtesy, and said:

"Scuse me, ladies, but de ole madam is gettin' mons'ous unpatient to see de young marster."

"Go to your mother at once, Mr. Harcourt. We can talk afterward. Of course, you must make this your home while you stay in the neighborhood. No, not a word of objection now, but go," said Mrs. Wynthrop with authority.

Harcourt bowed, and obeyed.

Martha preceded him across the broad hall, into a large front parlor, and through this to a rear door communicating with what was now called the parlor bedchamber, though formerly it had been only known as "mother's room."

Martha paused, with her hand on the knob of the lock, and said:

"Now, young marse, yo' mus'n't show no s'prise at nuffin de ole madam say, nor likewise conterdic' her."

With these words, she opened the door.

CHAPTER VII

IN DOROTHY HARCOURT'S ROOM

It was a large, square, low-ceiled, but light and cheerful room, with two north windows looking out upon a green and shaded lawn, now just beginning to spring and bud with grass and blossoms which leaf and flower in April, and two west windows, opening on a back piazza, beyond which was the bleaching ground, with the laundry and the summer kitchen in the distance.

The four-post bedstead, with its blue chintz curtains, in the corner, between the north and the west windows; the tall chest of drawers, topped by its tall looking-glass, that stood between the two north windows; the two buffets, one on each side of the fireplace—that on the right holding the household medicines and cordials, that on the left the toilet service, which, when in use, was placed upon its top; the deep easychair by the side of the bed; the flag and cane armchairs, with their quilted patchwork cushions; last and best, the open wood fire, before which the old lady now sat, with her knitting in her hand.

She wore a rusty black bombazine dress, with a white muslin handkerchief crossed over her breast, and a white net cap with black ribbon, above the plainly parted gray hair.

As soon as she heard the door open she turned quickly around, and, seeing Harcourt, arose, trembling, and tottered to meet him, exclaiming:

"My own dear Will! I am so glad to see you!"

"My dear mother!" he responded, with emotion.

And he caught her in his arms and gently replaced

her in the chair from which she had started to receive him.

But for his prompt action she might have sunk to the floor, so weak she seemed, although he had been told she was in such good bodily health. Yes; and very pale and thin she looked, although he had been informed that her appetite was so excellent.

He stooped and kissed her, drew a chair to her side, and sat down and took her hand.

"I am so happy to be with you again, mother. And you are happy here, are you not?" he inquired.

She looked at him strangely for a moment, and then answered:

"Why, of course I am happy here, dear. Why shouldn't I be so? I have nothing to trouble me but your long absences, and, of course, I know they are necessary, and that you are doing well at the university. It would be very selfish in me to wish to keep you home, especially as I have all the rest of them with me."

"All the rest!" repeated Harcourt sadly, beginning now, for the first time, to realize the delusion of his mother.

"Yes, dear, they are all here. John did not go to the Naval Academy, as he wished to do, nor Peyton to West Point. The defeat of our party, and the total change of administration prevented their success. And I was not sorry. I would rather have them home, for I am growing old, I am growing very old," slowly muttered the poor lady.

Harcourt suppressed a groan. He saw that the recent past was totally obliterated from his mother's mind, which had gone back to the time before the Civil War, and she talked of John and Peyton, both of whom had fallen in battle, and whose bodies filled unknown graves.

"I am so pleased to have you here, my dear; but I do not understand it. This is not vacation time. How is it that you are able to leave the university in the middle of the term?"

While Harcourt was hesitating how to answer this

question she put on her spectacles, took a good, deep look at him, and then saved him the trouble of a reply by saying:

"Ah, I see. Yes, I see. You have been studying too hard—overworking yourself, and you have been obliged to come home and take a rest. And you came by the night train, and reached here only this morning, did you not?"

"No, mother; I got here last night."

"Last night! Why did you not come to me at once?"

"You had retired to bed."

"Where did you sleep?"

"In your old room at the cabin," answered Harcourt, thrown off his guard.

"In—my—old—room—in—the—cabin! What on earth do you mean, Will?"

"Oh, I mean, of course, in Martha's best room in her cabin, where she made me up a bed, so as to prevent me from disturbing the family," said Harcourt, correcting himself as well as he could.

"Just as if the return of one's son at any hour of the day or night would or could disturb his family! Where did you get your breakfast?"

"Martha had an excellent breakfast waiting for me in the cabin as soon as I rose in the morning."

"You should have slept here in your own old room over mine, and have taken your breakfast with the family. Will, do you know in was very eccentric in you to do otherwise? And then, the idea of your saying that you slept in my old room at the cabin! Will, what put such a thing as that in your head, my dear?"

He did not answer promptly. He was thinking what he could say, and resolving to be very cautious in future talks with his mother.

She looked at him very keenly, and then exclaimed:

"Will, I see how it is. You have overworked your poor brain. Your mind is unhinged, Will. You must not go back to the university again until after the summer vacation. You can put off getting your degree for a year or two years. You are young enough to wait, and I will not have you overworking your

brain to a dangerous extent. I will speak to your father about it."

"My—father!" muttered poor Will, thinking of the gallant soldier who fell fighting side by side with heroic Stonewall Jackson.

"Yes. Have you seen your father this morning?"

"No," said Will.

"Then he must be in the study, with the overseer and the farm books, making out the first quarter of the year; for it is near the first of April, you know."

"Yes," said Harcourt helplessly.

"And now, Will, you will have a gay time. The house is full of company. Two of the loveliest girls you ever saw, and two of the pleasantest young men, and a very agreeable married couple. We are, every one of us, charmed with them. And I am very glad you have come to enjoy their company and help to entertain them. I am well, but somehow or other I do not seem to have any strength in my back or limbs, and when I attempt to stand up I feel so uncertain on my feet."

Poor Will understood this symptom but too well.

"And so you see," she continued, "I cannot do my part toward entertaining our visitors as I could wish. I have to leave almost everything to the girls and boys. But they are all very happy together, I assure you. Have you seen your brothers and sisters?"

"No, mother," sadly replied poor Will.

"Well, then, I suppose the boys are in the fields somewhere, and, of course, the girls are with our visitors," said the old lady, and she spoke so calmly and so naturally that no one unacquainted with the circumstances could possibly have suspected her perfect sanity.

"It seems to me you have grown a great deal since you went to college, Will," she said, after a pause. Some furtive ray of memory had vaguely suggested that "Will" was a mere boy at the time which her illusions had reproduced, and in which she now lived.

Harcourt knew not what to say better than this:

"You think so, mother?"

"Why, I know so. You are quite a man now. You will be falling in love with some of these pretty girl visitors of mine presently. I wonder where those sisters of yours can be."

Where they can be? Long ago in the better world, he hoped; but their bodies lay in the churchyard of All Souls' Parish, at Logwood.

"They are with their visitors, I suppose, and cannot leave; and perhaps they do not know that you are here; for if they did I think they would come running in anyhow—visitors or no visitors. Go find them, dear. They will be so delighted to see you, and they will introduce you to their young lady friends."

Harcourt got up, kissed the wrinkled forehead of the aged woman, and with a deep sigh left the room, passing into the front parlor.

There he found Martha waiting for him.

"Wot I tell yo', young marse?" she inquired.

"The truth, Martha, and a very distressing truth," he sighed.

"Doane yo' say dat, young marse. Her 'lusions mak' her so contented. An' sometimes I doane fink dey's altogedder 'lusions, nudder."

"What do you mean, Martha?"

"Sometimes I fink dey is 'bout her, sure 'nough."

"Martha!"

"Yes, I do, young marse—sometimes! W'y, w'en I year de ole madam talkin' to de ole marster jus' as ef he were here p'esen', I tell yo' it do gimmy de creeps! I feel like he were dere sure 'nough, on'y I couldn' see him. Trufe I'm tellin' yo' young marse."

"Martha, you must not give such reins to your imagination."

"Wot dat yo' say 'bout yain, young marse?"

"I mean to say you must not think so."

"Can't help ob it, sah. Now take tudder day. I was stan'in' up fo' my mist'ess, a holdin' o' a hank o' yarn, stretch out ober my han's, w'en all ob a sudden de ole madam take de hank offen my yists, an' she say, quiet as yo' please, de ole mist'ess do:

"'Dere's yo' marster, Marffy. Jaw de yockin-cha' up to de fire fo' him.'

"Well, I look youn', but dere was nobody in de yoom but we two—de ole mist'ess an' me. An' she say 'gain:

"'W'y doane yo' min' wot I tell yo', Marffy, 'oman? Set a cha' fo' yo' marster.'

"Well, sah, I felt icicles meltin' all ober my skin an' tricklin' down my backbone. Use as I were to de ole madam's queer 'lucinations, my ha'r riz dat time, an' my teef chattered. I felt jus' as if a ghose was dere, dough I couldn' see him. But ole mist'ess look at me stern like, an' I took an' push de cha' up to de fire, an' ole mist'ess say:

"'Set yo' down dere, Everard. Dere, now! Put yo' feet ter de fire—dat's yight."

"An' den she began talkin' ter him, an' axin' questions, an' 'peared to fink he answered back, dough I heard no voice but hers, an' likewise saw nobody but her. An' p'esently, 'pears like he riz to leab, 'case she say, ole mist'ess did:

"'W'ere yo' goin'? Mus' yo' go? Oh, well, if yo' hab all dat to do, of co'se you mus', but come back soon as yo' get frough.'

"An' den, in about de nex' minute, ole mist'ess say to me:

"'Marffy, put back yo' marster's cha'.'

"Now, young marse, I'd a yudder tetched a live yattlesnake dan dat cha' w'ere de ghose had set, but I had to do it. So I prayed ef de Lord would spare my life dat time I'd try to be a better 'oman. An' I push dat cha' back sort ob gingerly, an' all my flesh creepin' offen my bones. An' yes, young marse, many an' many's de time sence dat I hab had to wait on de ghoses, as I couldn' see! No, I couldn't see, nor likewise year! T'anks be to goodness fo' dat much! Fo' ef I had seed or yeard dem indiwisable fings I should a-drap down dead! I know I should!"

"Martha, there is no reality in all this. They are but the delusions, hallucinations of an infirm brain," said Harcourt gravely.

"Young marse, yo' may call 'em 'lusions or 'lucinations, or any fine name yo' please, an' so do I—sometimes—but mos'ly I do call 'em by de name I knowed 'em by w'en I was a young 'oman. I calls 'em ghoses. But dere! I mus' 'liver Missus Wyn'op's messidge. She tell me to tell yo', w'en yo' come out, to come into her yoom an' see her."

"Very well, I will go at once," said the young man; and leaving Martha to rejoin her mistress, who was never left alone, he went directly to Mrs. Wynthrop's sitting-room.

He found the three tall, fair women employed as they had been on his first call.

They all left work and made him welcome to the fireside.

"How did you find the dear mother?" inquired the elder lady.

"Not so well as I had been led to expect," said Harcourt with a sigh.

"But, indeed, beyond the weakness of her limbs, due to her one single malady, she has good health. She never suffers in mind or body. She has a good appetite, fine spirits, and she enjoys life even more than we do, I fancy. Think of that, Mr. Harcourt."

"Yes—I know—but——"

"But she has her illusions, you mean to say? Well, these illusions never disturb her; they soothe and satisfy her. We should accept them."

"Is she under medical treatment?"

"Dr. Wall attended her during her severe illness, and Dr. Lathrop was called in as consulting physician when disease of the brain began to develop. Dr. Wall has lately ceased his visits, as unnecessary, but Dr. Lathrop comes two or three times a week. He has retired from practice, but he comes to Mrs. Harcourt, because he is something of a specialist on nerves and brain, and also he comes to her for old neighborhood's sake."

"What is his opinion of her condition?"

"He thinks that she requires only tonics, full nutrition, fresh air, and such passive exercise as we can

give her. He thinks that she may live many years in this condition, but that her final recovery can scarcely be hoped for."

Harcourt sighed profoundly, and after some little delay said:

"Will you pardon me, madam, if I venture to speak of business?"

"What a question! Of course, business must be spoken of," said the kindly but very practical hostess.

"Then—during my mother's illness there must have been expenses—debts incurred—and——"

"There were expenses, certainly, but there are no debts."

"I—do not understand."

"Then let me explain. Margaret here is the medium of correspondence between Mrs. Harcourt and her Washington and Baltimore friends, and this began from her writing a letter for old Moses to his mistress when she was last in Washington."

"It was very kind of Miss Wynthrop. I heard of it," said Harcourt.

"Well, she has been in correspondence with a certain lawyer, Amos Merritt, of Washington, who forwards from time to time money for an old debt due by a Baltimorean to your father, and now being paid by installments. The money is sent in checks, made payable to Dorothy Harcourt. She is quite able to write her autograph on the back, and with her indorsement Margaret has got them cashed at the Logwood bank, and has paid doctors' and druggists' bills, and also some others. She has all the receipts, if you would like to lok at them."

Harcourt's face flamed. The idea of his requirement of these receipts from such disinterested benefactors!

"By no means, my dear madam! But since you kindly give me permission, I would like to make some arrangement for my dear mother's permanent abode with you," he said.

"Well, talk to Margaret about it. She is my housekeeper, accountant, and everything. Margaret, my

dear, take Mr. Harcourt into the office and settle this matter with him. By the time you get through your father and the boys will be in for their dinner."

"Come, Mr. Harcourt, and see papa's little office. It used to be called 'the study,' but papa never 'studies,' he only keeps his farm books there."

Harcourt followed her out of doors to a little brick building of one room, standing on the lawn in the rear of the irregular house. She opened the door and admitted him. It was a rude place, heated by an iron stove, and furnished with a writing-desk, a book shelf, a table, an armchair and two or three other chairs.

"Mr. Harcourt," she inquired, when they were seated, "did you know this Mr. Amos Merritt, of Washington?"

"Very slightly," answered the young man.

"The reason why I asked was this—he seems to be so anxious to find you. In every letter he has written, enclosing checks, he has inquired if we had heard from you. And I must also add that we, too, often returned the question, and asked if he had received news of the missing man; for you were a missing man for months, Mr. Harcourt."

"I know it; but my dear Miss Wynthrop, I cannot just now fully explain my absence."

"I do not ask you to do so. Your mother thought that you were at college. She pined to see you, especially at Christmas; but she thought that you remained at college to pursue your studies through the holidays."

"But you knew better?"

"Of course we did; for I wrote to President Ewell to inquire for you, and learned that you had not been there since last summer."

"And you did not tell my mother?"

"Oh, no! We could not. We said nothing, but left her to that delusion, as to others."

"I thank you for that kind consideration. Ah! I have so much to thank you for, Miss Wynthrop!"

"You make me wish there was no such word as 'thankful.' I told you this morning that we only

pleased ourselves in trying to make Mrs. Harcourt happy."

"You are angels!"

"Fiddle-de-dee!"

Now, if there be anything that takes a poor fellow down it is "fiddle-de-dee!" Harcourt collapsed. Margaret Wynthrop laughed, and said:

"This is a rude farm office, where accounts are audited, and not a place for sentiment, Mr. Harcourt. I brought you here for the settlement of business."

"I am at your orders, Miss Wynthrop."

"First of all, I would ask you if I am liberty to write to Mr. Amos Merritt and end his suspense and anxiety on your account?"

"Most certainly. I have not been in hiding, though I may not now explain the cause of my disappearance. Write, and set the worthy counselor at ease; also set at ease the party behind him, and for whom he acts, for my acquaintance with Mr. Merritt would scarcely account for his personal interest in my affairs."

"I suspected that there was some friend in the background," Margaret Wynthrop candidly confessed. "But I cannot conjecture who it may be. Can you?"

"No, I cannot with any reasonable degree of probability," Harcourt replied.

"Well, I have a check, received this morning, to acknowledge. I will 'take this opportunity,' as our grandparents used to write in the beginning of their letters, to let Mr. Merritt and 'the power behind the throne' know that you are here. And now," continued the girl, turning to the writing-desk, unlocking the drawer, and taking from it a sealed envelope, "here are all the receipts for money expended for the benefit of Mrs. Harcourt."

"I beg that you will keep them. I do not wish to see them," pleaded the young man.

"But why not? You will hereafter transact your mother's business."

"No," said Harcourt, "I cannot. I must go away again in a very few days. Pray, Miss Wynthrop, continue your work of Christian love. Be still the trustee

and guardian of this poor lady, for a time at least. It may not be long," pleaded Harcourt.

"Why should you think it necessary to be so very emphatic? I shall take pleasure in caring for Mrs. Harcourt just so long as she has need and I have power."

"Oh! thank you! And continue to expend those checks and the checks that I will send you also, for her necessities, including the cost of her board and lodging, fixing the latter according to your own judgment and pleasure. Oh! I loathe to speak to you of money matters!"

"But why should you dislike to do so? It is necessary. I will do as you wish, and give the result of my figuring before you leave us."

Margaret Wynthrop drew a small silver watch from her pocket and consulted it.

"It is our dinner hour, and mamma will be waiting. We had better return to the house now," she said, as she replaced her timepiece. Then she locked the desk and left the room, followed by Harcourt.

As they came toward the rear of the house they saw Martha leave the kitchen, which was a separate building, and enter the back door of Mrs. Harcourt's room, bearing a well laden dinner tray in her hands.

"Does my mother always take her meals alone?" Harcourt inquired, as they entered the rear door of the hall.

"Yes, always; not only from necessity, but from choice. She is too feeble to sit up at the table, and too disinclined to motion to walk to the dining-room."

As Margaret spoke the front door opposite to them opened, and Mr. Wynthrop and his eldest son, Silas, entered the hall.

Mr. Wynthrop was a tall, gaunt, dark man, with black hair, cut rather short, and black goatee, both well streaked with silver.

His son was also tall and thin, but fair, like his mother and sisters.

Both men were clothed in rough, serviceable suits of brown cheviot.

On seeing Margaret, and recognizing the visitor who was with her as Harcourt, both men came up with outstretched hands and hearty words of welcome.

"Glad to see you," spoke both in a breath.

"When did you arrive?" inquired the elder.

"At the Lodge here only this morning," answered Harcourt.

"Dinner ready, Margaret?" inquired the younger.

"I suppose so, Si. I have just come from the office."

As she spoke the door of the sitting-room opened, and Mrs. Wynthrop, who had heard the talk, came out with her daughter Elizabeth, and said:

"Yes, dinner is ready; we are only waiting for you."

They entered the dining-room, which was just in the rear of the sitting-room, and gathered around the table.

Mr. Wynthrop, a churchman of the old Puritanical type, asked a blessing on the feast in a rather long prayer, but when that was over he fell to, helping his guest, his family and himself with more liberality than discretion, and then gave himself up to the enjoyment of creature comforts with more than ordinary zeal.

But the meal was not prolonged. Twenty minutes finished it for everybody.

When they left the table Martha came up and said to Harcourt:

"Young marse, de ole madam is axin' fo' yo' ag'in. She seems moughty queer, she do."

Harcourt immediately followed the woman to his mother's room.

She was sitting in the same chair, knitting, as before.

"Sit down, Will, my dear. Your father has just gone out. He says that I must cheer up, for I shall soon be well—well enough to leave this room; and Will, he says that he has got a beautiful new home for me, where I shall be sure to grow strong and hearty, and renew my youth. Just think of that, Will!" said the poor lady, with her face beaming.

"I am glad to hear that, mother. Did he tell you where it was?"

"Well, no. I asked him, but he only said it was not far off; it was nearer than I thought; but he said he couldn't tell me any more about it because he wanted to give me a happy surprise. And—well, I really think he has been building a beautiful house while I have been here. I know I shall get perfectly well again, because your father says so, and I have such faith in his judgment. Where are the young ladies?" she next inquired.

"They have gone into the drawing-room, mother."

"Well, then, dear, go and make yourself agreeable to them. I shall take a nap. I always do after dinner. You can come to me again when I wake."

"Let me stay until you fall asleep, mother. I will not disturb you. Will you lie down?"

"No, dear; just lean back and close my eyes. I sleep best in my chair in the daytime," she answered, as she composed herself for her nap.

Harcourt watched her until she fell asleep. He was anxious to observe her in that state. He saw that she slept calmly, and breathed easily; and then he stole out of the room, found Martha, sent her to stay with her mistress, and then joined the ladies.

Mrs. Wynthrop would not hear of Harcourt leaving the lodge to take up his abode at the cabin, but insisted that he should occupy a spare room just over the parlor chamber tenanted by his mother.

From the day of his arrival at Lone Lodge poor Will Harcourt began to improve in health. Two of the heaviest burdens on his heart were lifted.

Roma had escaped unharmed from Hanson. His mother was happy, comfortable and well cared for. She would never know the black cloud that overshadowed his own future. Those two beloved ones, to save whom from shame and despair he had been driven to do that "deed without a name," were, at least, safe from injury.

As for himself, he knew that he had never intended to commit a crime; that so far as he was concerned

the death of Yelverton was, indeed, a mere accident, yet none the less did it weigh so heavily on his conscience that he felt the only relief for him would be to give himself up to justice and let the law have its will of him. And this he would do so soon as he could do it without wounding others, when his mother would be safe in her heavenly home, when Roma would learn the whole bitter truth and understand and forgive him; then he could face the consequences of his crime and bear the doom of death or the penal servitude that the law would deal out to him, better, much better, than he had borne the weight of a guilty conscience.

So, having settled his plans for the future, and living now for a few days in such an atmosphere of peace, love and light, his health improved and his spirits rose—yes, even against his will and his conscience, his spirits rose—and he was strangely comforted.

His mother noticed his improvement, and expressed her delight.

"See what rest and recreation have done for you, dear Will," she said, smiling on him as he sat one morning by her chair. "You must not think of going back to college until after the summer vacation is over."

"Dear mother, I would gladly stay if I might, but I must leave you in a few days. I will, however, come often to see you," he said, with a responsive smile.

"Ah! what a devoted student you are!" she exclaimed, patting his head. "The one genius of our family. We shall all be very proud of you some day, Will, my boy."

As he thought of his blighted ambition, and his penal future, he could only smile at her words, as one might smile at stake and faggot.

But he was pleased that she took his proposed departure so pleasantly.

The early spring days passed cheerfully. Mr. Wynthrop and Mr. Silas often drew Harcourt out to go with them to the fields, and often, seeing those two

men work with the hired laborers, he would join with them, and take hold heartily of any work that might be going on. The evenings in the parlor, with the kind-hearted, gay-spirited women of the family, were very pleasant, also, though he only joined them when his mother was asleep, or when she bade him go and entertain their "visitors."

She was never lonesome, for she never seemed to be alone.

Almost every time he went in to see her she had something to tell him about his father, or John, or Peyton, or Caroline, or Ann Eliza, who, one or another, or all, had just been in to see her.

Harcourt had grown so accustomed to these "delusions" that he was no longer shocked by them, but was reconciled to what made the poor lady happy.

Martha, on the contrary, though she had so long borne them, could never get used to them.

"To lib wid ghoses!" she would complain to Harcourt, "to hab 'em all youn' yo' day an' night, to year de ole madam talkin' an' laughin' 'long ob 'em! An' nebber to see 'em, nor year 'em, but Lor', I doane wan' ter do dat! no, sah! But den, not to know how close dey may come to yo'! Oh, Lor'! It's wusn de feber'n ager! I gets dashes ob ice water an' flames ob fire ober me—one arter de oder! Ugh! An' I darsn't tel de ole madam dey is ghoses, an' nuffin but ghoses, 'caze she fink dey's yale, an' Missus Wyn'op say it might kill her to tell her dat. Ugh! Wot I hab come to in de wenable ole ages ob my pilg'imidge!"

"Bear your burden, Martha, and you will meet your reward," said the young man.

"I has heared my burden—cheerful! an' I does bear my burdens—patient! But it ain't burdens as is turnin' ob my ha'r w'ite—burdens is nat'rel. It's ghoses—ghoses wot yo' can't see—fank Him fo' dat much!—nor take hol' ob, nor turn out, nor likewise do nuffin wid!"

"Well, they wouldn't hurt you if they could, and they couldn't hurt you if they would. Besides, you will be a ghost yourself some day."

"Oh, Lor', young marse, yo's bad as dem. Dere! I gwine away."

Many such talks as these took place between the young man and the old servant.

At last the day came when Harcourt felt that he must leave the pleasant country house, now that it was looking so beautiful in the early April weather, with grass and foliage all of that tender emerald green only seen in the young spring, with the fruit trees all in blossom, with the hyacinths and daffodils, the tulips and jonquils, all budding in the flower bed; with the lovely crocuses and violets blooming all over the lawn—he must leave all that, and the genial family, and the dear mother, and the comforts of home, and go back to self-imposed servitude. True, Harcourt might have got more congenial employment as a teacher, but he told himself that he was unworthy to become an instructor of youth, and that nothing remained for him but manual labor.

He took leave of all his kind friends, who parted from him with real regret.

He bade a tender good-by to his old mother, who let him go very cheerfully, saying:

"Your father and John say that you ought to go, and must go, and that I must not mind, as they will be with me. So I do not mean to hinder you, my boy."

"Yes," said Harcourt sadly, "it is true. I ought to go, and I must go. Good-by, dear mother."

"God bless you, my good boy!"

So they parted.

Harcourt had intended to walk to Logwood, but when he stepped out upon the piazza he saw the pony carriage before the house, and Margaret Wynthrop, in a coat and hat, on the seat.

"I have to go to do some shopping in Goeberlin, so, if you please, I will drive you there," she said.

"I thank you very much. But suppose you let me take the reins; would not that be more fitting?" he inquired as he stepped into the carriage.

"As you please. But I am used to driving," she said as she surrendered the "ribbons."

That drive up and down hill, through the tender, budding April woods, remained a pleasant episode of life in the memory of Will Harcourt.

When they reached Logwood there was a full hour to spare before the train was due.

"Now," said Margaret, "will you go around with me on my shopping expedition, or shall you go directly to the depot?"

"To the depot, if you please," said Harcourt, for he thought that his company might really be an embarrassment to the young woman on such an occasion.

They drove to the little wayside group of sheds that did duty as a depot, and Harcourt got out, thanked the young lady for the lift, took leave of her, and went into the station to buy his ticket and wait for the train.

It promised to be a weary waiting, so he went out and walked up and down the platform for exercise. He had not passed more than twenty minutes in this manner when suddenly he saw Margaret Wythrop driving back toward the station and waving a letter in her hand.

He hastened to meet her.

"It is for you," she said. "I have just taken it out of the post office. Good by! good by!"

She handed the letter, turned the pony's head, and drove off.

Harcourt glanced at the superscription, reeled, and nearly fell to the ground.

A railway porter caught and steadied him.

"What's the matter with you, young man? Have you been drinking? No, your breath don't smell so."

The porter, holding his arm, guided his steps into the waiting-room.

Harcourt submitted like an automaton.

The porter let him down on a chair and left him. Harcourt stared at the letter that he held fast clutched in his hand.

It was from Roma!

He had recognized her handwriting at a glance, and was overwhelmed by the sight of it.

Now he stared at it in a conflict of emotion—joy, shame, fear—that he should hear from her again, that she should write to him.

But he scarcely dared to open the letter.

What should he find there? Oh, what scorn and hatred—what reproaches and maledictions should he meet? And all so well deserved.

At length, with a desperate resolution, as one who had been compelled to go into fire would take the plunge, he tore open the letter, and read:

"Will, my own dear Will, I have only just this instant learned where you are staying. Come to me at once, my beloved. We cannot reach a mutual understanding by letters. I am just starting for Goblin Hall. Meet me there. Your own ROMA."

It was well the waiting-room was empty, that no one might witness the utter breakdown of the young man. He dropped his head upon his hands and burst into a storm of sobs and tears—the first tears that he had shed in the tragedy of his youth.

"It needed but these words," he wailed, in low tones. "It needed but these words to complete despair. Coals of fire! Coals of fire! Coals of fire!"

CHAPTER VIII

ROMA'S DELUSIVE JOY

WHEN gray-haired Amos Merritt burst in upon Roma Fronde on that early April day, and, with almost boyish exultation, exclaimed, "I have good news for you! Will Harcourt is found!" great throbs of joy pulsated through her frame, almost depriving her of the power of speech. She who had borne the heav-

iest shocks of fate without losing her self-command, was almost overcome by this sudden joy. She started to her feet, and uttered but one syllable:

"Where?"

"At Lone Lodge, with Mrs. Harcourt," replied the lawyer.

"How?" she panted.

"In good health. Both mother and son are at present the guests of the Wynthrops. I had a letter today from Miss Margaret. She writes that they——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Roma, recovering her self-possession with great effort. "I must write immediately to catch the mail. I will hear details later."

And she hastened to her desk and wrote the letter which we have already seen, asking Will Harcourt to meet her as soon as possible at Goblin Hall, for which she was about to start.

She closed and directed the letter, and was about to leave the room to put it in the house box for the mail messenger, when Mr. Merritt arrested her steps by saying:

"Give it to me. I am going directly back to my chambers, and I will post it on the way."

"Thank you; but I thought you were going to tell me all about the Harcourts?"

"So I was; but, on second thoughts, I will leave Miss Wynthrop's letter with you. Here it is. You see, I really ought to be at my office. It is now ten minutes after ten, and I have to meet a client at eleven. Are you still resolved to leave the city tomorrow morning?"

"Oh, yes. I have written to Will Harcourt to meet me at Goblin Hall immediately. That means as soon as steam can take him there, of course."

"Then I shall return to spend the last evening with you. Good-morning, my child."

"Good-morning, good friend."

The lawyer left the room.

Little Owlet, who had been sitting demurely on a hassock, nursing a black bull pup Tom had given her, now looked up and asked:

"What is it all about?"

"A dear, very dear friend, whom I have not seen for months," replied Roma.

"So I thought, from what the lawyer said; but he did say, too, that somebody had been found. Now, nobody could be found unless they had been lost, could they?"

"Of course not."

"Was it your friend who was lost?"

"Yes, dear."

"And his name was Will something or other. I remember that much."

"Will Harcourt."

"Oh, yes! That was it! Who lost him?"

"He himself, I think."

"Was he a very little boy?"

"No, dear; he is a man."

"Then, if he is a man, he is not possessed of common sense, to go and lose himself. Who found him?"

"I don't know, dear. I wish to read this letter, which will tell me, perhaps."

"Well, read it, and I will go and take George Thomas out for a walk on the pavement," said the child; and she arose and carried the puppy, on whom she had bestowed the double name, out of the room.

Roma read Margaret Wynthrop's letter, giving the account of Harcourt's sudden arrival at Lone Lodge, and of his distress at finding the mind of his aged mother failing, even although that failure was attended by a happy hallucination. From the tone of the letter Roma judged that Harcourt had never mentioned his defeated marriage, and that the Wynthrops were ignorant of it.

This circumstance seemed very strange to Roma, and if it did not deepen the mystery of that unparalleled marriage ceremony, it certainly threw no light upon its darkness.

But she would soon see Harcourt, and learn the truth from him, she said to herself, as she laid aside Miss Wynthrop's letter and set about completing her last preparations for her journey.

In the midst of packing her traveling bag she was interrupted by the entrance of Owlet with her puppy in her arms.

"I thought you were going to read your letter? If I had known you were going to work I would have stayed to help you,' said Owlet solemnly.

"I have finished my letter, dear, and now I am only putting up a few things in my bag for use during our journey," Roma explained.

"Well, then, let me help you. You sit down in your big easy-chair, and I will put George Thomas to bed in his basket. He is very sleepy. And I will bring you all the things you want to pack in the bag," Owlet insisted. And she laid her pet in his nest, and came and stood before her benefactress in an attitude of attention.

"But I have quite finished now, dear, and there is nothing more to do," Roma explained.

"Well, if I can't be useful I might as well be dead," said Owlet with an aggrieved air.

"Dear child! Why should you say such things?"

"I heard Mrs. Brown talking to somebody, and she said people who are of no use in the world had better be out of it."

"But that was a hard saying; besides, do you not think that the Lord knows when it is best to take any one out of the world?"

"You've got me there," said Owlet. "I give in."

"That is right."

"And anybody who would not give in when they are wrong is not possessed of common sense," concluded Owlet.

At eight o'clock Mr. Merritt came to spend his last evening with Roma.

Owlet was allowed to sit up with them.

"I wonder what you will do with this child?" inquired the lawyer in an aside to Roma.

"I shall do with her, if I should be permitted to keep her, just what I should do with a little orphan sister, if I were blessed with one."

"Well, now, Roma, my child, I did not come here

to loaf. What can I do for you in the way of preparation for to-morrow? Any trunk to cord up, or to sit down on, or to be dispatched to the express office? In short, anything to be done that I can do for you?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"No, nothing, thank you. Our baggage has all been sent off, and you have nothing to do except to sit here and give us your company, so long as you can spare the time," Roma replied.

"Yes," added Owlet, striking into the conversation, "you need not think we only like to see you for what you can do for us. We like to see you because we like you."

"Thank you, ma'am; that is very complimentary," laughed the old lawyer.

"I meant it to be," said Owlet solemnly.

"Now, Roma, my dear," said Mr. Merritt, as he rose to bid them good-night, "instead of meeting you at the depot at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, as I had first intended to do, I shall call here with a carriage at half-past eight to take you and the child there."

"Oh, dear friend, do not put yourself to that trouble," Roma objected.

"But, my child, it will give me half an hour more to spend in your company, and that will be a great boon to a poor old fellow who is about to lose you, for heaven knows how many months," sighed the old lawyer, lugubriously.

"You take a holiday every summer, I suppose?"

"Last summer contained the first holiday I have had since my college days."

"But you will certainly take a holiday this summer?"

"Oh, yes, and every summer henceforth, so long as I live, please the Lord."

"Then come and spend this next one with us among the wooded hills of Maryland."

"May I? Thank you! I certainly will do so, with pleasure, if I am spared. Good-night, my dear. Good-night, little Owl!"

So, after shaking hands with Roma, and kissing Owlet, the lawyer left the room.

Soon after this Roma rang her bell, and when it was answered by Tom she gave him a parting "remembrance" for himself and one for his mother.

Tom grinned with delight, and then suddenly "boo-hooed" at the thought that his friends were going away.

"Don't cry. I dare say you and auntie can come and spend your summer holiday with us, too," said Owlet.

"Oh, yes, Tom," added Roma, "if ever you or your mother would like to change city work for country work, come to me, and you shall have employment. Stay, I will give you my address, so that you can write or get a letter written whenever you please."

She took a card, wrote her full address, and gave it to the boy.

Tom stopped howling as he pocketed it, and said:

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Mammy like to go back to de country, mammy do, as the city ain't wot it's cracked up to be, nohow, mammy say."

"I suppose your mother has gone to bed now, but tell her she can come and take leave of me any time to-morrow between seven and half-past eight o'clock. Now, good-night, Tom. God bless you," said Roma very gently as she dismised him.

"Good-night, ma'am—and—little Miss—oh, boo-hoo-woo!" howled the boy as he ran out of the room.

"Now, my little Owlet, we must go to bed if we wish to get up early in the morning," Roma explained.

And in twenty minutes more the lady and the child had retired; but only Owlet went to sleep. Roma was kept wide awake with thoughts of the coming interview and explanation between herself and Harcourt. It was near morning when she first fell into a fitful sleep, from which she was soon fully aroused by the restlessness of Owlet, who had got up and dressed herself, and was fidgeting about the room in a manner wholly inconsistent with her usually still and staid demeanor.

"Oh, you are awake!" she said when she heard Roma stir and saw her eyes open. "It is after seven o'clock, and you told Tom's mother that she might come any time between seven and half-past eight."

"You extremely literal Owlet, has the woman been up to see me?" inquired Roma.

"No, ma'am, she hasn't; but I hear her coming now," Owlet said.

Roma also heard the cheery voice of the cook as she came along the hall, talking to some one in her company, who did not answer.

Roma stepped out of bed, drew on her dressing-gown, thrust her feet into slippers, and sat down in her armchair to receive the visitors.

Owlet opened the door before they had time to rap, and admitted Tom and his mother.

"Gwine away dis mornin', young mist'ess? I's orful sorry to year it, an' I'se orful busy, long o' de breakfas', too, dough dere ain't mo' dan one-quarter ob de people in de house as dere was in de winter, neider. Still, breakfas' is breakfas', an' it has fo' to be got," said Lucy, with a succession of old country courtesies, as she stood respectfully before the lady.

"I am sorry to part with you, too," Roma replied.

"An' young mist'ess, I do fank yo' so much fo' dat same gif' yo' gib me. I ain't had no sich a gif' sence ebber I lef' de ole Snake in ye ole times 'fo' de wo', I ain't, fo' de trufe; an' I fank yo', young mist'ess, fo' dat same fibe-dollar gol' piece."

"You are very welcome; but the 'Snake,' did you say?"

"De ole Sarpint—yes, mist'ess."

"What old Serpent?" inquired Roma, for though she knew very well what Lucy meant, having heard from Tom that he and his "mammy" had come from the Isle of Storms, yet she wished to draw the woman out, to make an opening by which she might naturally disclose her own connection with that place, which she had not wished to do until now, when she was about to leave Washington.

"De islan', young mist'ess, w'ere de fambly ob de Guyon libbed ebber sence de ole times 'fo' de wo."

"Did you live with the Guyons?"

"Lor', yes, young mist'ess; I 'longed to dem. Did yo' know 'em, young mist'ess?"

"Very slightly, I regret to say, though my dear mother, who died when I was a babe, was Romaine Guyon, the sister of Henry Guyon, who died three years ago."

Lucy's eyes opened to their widest extent, and for a moment she seemed deprived of the power of speech, and then she exclaimed:

"Now de Lor' hab mercy on my po' ole soul! Young mist'ess, yo' ain't nebber de darter ob Miss Romaine, wot married dat young man f'om de Wes', named F'onde?"

"Yes, I am her daughter."

"Well, Lor', I might 'a' knowed it by de likeness, well as de manners—so I might. To fink ob meetin' ob yo' yere, in dis bressed house, in dis furrin city ob Washington! Well, wunners will nebber cease! An' jes' as I hab foun' yo' out yo's gwine to leabe!"

And here Lucy put her apron up to her eyes and sobbed aloud.

"See here, I did not tell you this to distress you, but to open a way for better days to come. I know that many of you elderly colored people who came to the city to live and find work are disappointed, either in work or wages, or in the ability of adapting yourselves to the new circumstances."

"Wot dat yo' say, young mist'ess? Please say it ober ag'in. I doane quite take it all in."

"I meant that some of you come to the city and don't find what you want, and would rather go back to the country, if you could."

"Dat's so! Lor', 'tain't 'cause people ain't good to me, 'cause dey is. But—no—'tain't 'cause dey doane gib good wages, 'cause dey does; but, honey, it's f'eedom one way, an' not f'eedom 'nudder way."

"What do you mean by that, Lucy?"

"Dis a way, honey; I yearns my own libin', an' has

my own money, an' w'en my work is done I kin go an' comt putty much as I p'ease; but, Lor', honey, dere ain't no place to go an' come to but streets an' streets, an' houses an' houses; an' I sort ob miss de fiel's an' de woods an' de country all t'rough. Dat's wot's de matter 'long ob me."

"I thought so. Well, at any time you please you may come to me at Goblin Hall ,and I will give you employment about the house."

"Oh, fanky, honey! An' Tom, too?"

"And Tom, too."

"Now, oh, Lor'! I's got to yun down an' ten' to breakfas'. Sary Ann is down dere, for true, but she ain't wuff much. Wot shill I sen' yo' up, young mist'ess, or would yo' yudder come down to de yestyant, now dere ain't hardly anybody dere, 'specially at dis airly hour ob de mornin'? Airly fo' de city, min' yo', young mist'ess. 'Twould be 'sidered moughty late fo' de country."

"I will go down, Lucy."

"Den I will try to see yo' ag'in, if it's only frough de do'. Fank de Lor' as de kitchen is jus' 'hind de yestyant!" said the cook, as with a half suppressed sob she left the room.

"Here, Tom!" exclaimed Roma, as the boy was about to follow. "Take all these things down to the hall. I shall not return to this room after leaving it."

And she gave her traveling bag, umbrella and shawls to the boy, who, with a half smothered howl, took them and went out.

Then Roma hastened to dress herself for her journey, and when she had done so she collected all her remaining effects, put them in a second bag, and then took a long, last look around the rooms she had occupied for four months, and might never see again. She opened the west window and looked out upon the bit of woods which the march of improvement had still spared behind this newly opened street in the northwestern suburb of "the city of magnificent distances."

She hoped that it would yet be spared, and inclosed in a park, rather than be swept away.

Then she invoked a blessing on the house and on all who might come into it.

Roma, in some moods of her mind, was devout almost to the verge of fanaticism, and had been more than once accused of superstition.

"Come, darling, we will go down now," she said, and took her little Owlet by the hand and led her out, the child carrying the dog basket in which the pup was to travel.

On the elevator she remembered the lad who ran the machine, and gave him a gift.

"You asked everybody else to come to see us in the country, why don't you ask poor Titus? He is an orphan boy, too," said Owlet.

"So I will," said Roma. Then, turning to the lad, who could not have been more than ten years old, though he did run the elevator, she said:

"Titus, what is your full name, dear?"

"Titus Blair, ma'am."

"Do you lodge here, or only come by the day?"

"I lodge here, ma'am."

"Well, Titus, if you should ever have a holiday, and would like to enjoy it in the country, you just tell Mr. Merritt—you know him, and you know where he lives—and he will send you to me."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. That would be too good!" exclaimed the lad, breaking into a broad grin.

"Here we are on the landing. Good-by, now, Titus," said Roma, shaking hands with him as they left the elevator.

"Good-by, Titus. Mind, when your holidays come, you are to ask Lawyer Merritt to send you down to Goblin Hall. He'll do anything for our lady here. I reckon he will marry her some day, and maybe I'll marry you, Titus, when we grow up," said Owlet, as she took Roma's hand and passed into the dining-room.

Roma sometimes felt a little shocked at the child's freedom, and even rudeness, of speech, but she could not yet find it in her heart to rebuke the newly be-

reaved orphan. She would defer all training until they should reach Goblin Hall, when she would begin it in the spirit of love.

"Is there any one else you would like to invite to Goblin Hall, ma'am?" she inquired, with sly humor, as she led Owlet into the dining-room and they sat down at one of the tables.

"Of course not," replied the child, looking at the questioner in grave wonder. "There are Mr. Merritt, Lucy, Tom and Titus. They are enough. We can't have all the world at Goblin Hall! 'There is reason in roasting eggs.'"

"I stand corrected," said Roma.

"There is Mr. Merritt now!" exclaimed Owlet, as the lawyer came in, and, without any ceremony, took a seat at the same table with them, saying:

"Good-morning, my dear. Good-morning, Miss Catherine. I have come to breakfast with you."

"We are very glad to see you, I am sure. Are we not, Owlet?" Roma said, shaking hands with her old friend.

"He knows we are. It's no use telling him," the child added.

"Fact is, Roma, I had no appetite at the early hour at which I ordered the carriage, but thought I should get one by the time I had driven from one end of the city to the other, and I have. Ah! here's Tom! What have you to serve up to us in the way of new luxuries? Fresh shad, by the powers! And fine strawberries! I am glad I came."

There was no one else in the dining-room at this early hour but our party, so not only could Tom give them his undivided attention, but Lucy came in on every excusable occasion for the sake of seeing and speaking with her own young mistress as often as possible.

When breakfast was over the lady and child once more took leave of their colored friends and went out, attended by the lawyer, who placed them in the carriage, where they found their effects placed by the careful hands of Tom.

Half an hour's drive brought them to the Baltimore & Ohio Railway depot, where they found the train for the west almost ready to start.

Mr. Merritt saw Roma and Owlet comfortably seated in a drawing-room car, and there took an affectionate leave of them.

CHAPTER IX

AT GOBLIN HALL

Little Owlet, though a young child, was an old traveler. Before she met her benefactress the days of her life that had not been spent in hotels and theaters had been passed in steamboats and railway trains. So to her there was none of the novelty that so much delights children. Yet she could not but enjoy the rapid motion through a beautiful country just bursting into leaf and blossom all over the land.

Mr. Merritt's friendly care had supplied Roma with all the new magazines, and for Owlet a basket of fruit and confectionery.

But Roma refrained from cutting the attractive pages, and gave herself up to the entertainment of her little traveling companion, and she was, in her turn, amused with the quaint remarks of the little owl.

The day passed without incidents other than the usual events of railway travel. This was an express train, and stopped only at the most important stations.

At two o'clock in the afternoon they had luncheon brought in from the restaurant car, and served on a little side table laid between Roma and Owlet's seat. Even this manner of meal, so new and delightful to most children, had no charm of novelty for this little theatrical waif. She ate and drank with the solemnity of "an old stager," and afterward took George Thomas from his basket and fed him. Then

she settled herself back in her big chair to take an after-dinner nap, like the proverbial and plethoric alderman.

Roma cut the pages of a magazine, and read.

The child slept on, lulled by the motion of the cars, until the sun set, when she opened her eyes to find her benefactress absorbed in the pages of her magazine.

"Don't you know you ought not to read when the train is in motion?" she gravely demanded.

"Why not, ma'am?" inquired Roma.

"If anybody but you had asked such a question I should think they were not possessed of common sense."

"But you have not answered my question, and really I would like to be informed why I ought not to read when the cars are in motion."

"Why, because it will ruin your eyes."

"Oh, but how do you know that, ma'am?"

"Because mamma always said so, and eyes were business with her. She had to take care of her eyes and keep them beautiful, to please people who came to see her dance in pantomime."

"I understand, and am convinced."

"Why, mamma would never read in the cars, or by gaslight, or even when she was lying down; she was so careful of her eyes. She used to——"

Here the child's voice, that had been quivering, suddenly broke down, and she sank on the floor, hid her face in the cushions of the chair, and broke into sobs and tears.

Roma gently lifted and gathered little Owlet to her bosom, bent tenderly over her, but spoke no word, for she felt it was best not to do so.

Presently Owlet's paroxysm of emotion exhausted itself, and she got off Roma's lap, went back to her chair, wiped her eyes, and said, penitently:

"Anybody might think I was not possessed of common sense, to behave so before the whole carload of people, and set them all to staring."

The men and women, and even the children among

their fellow passengers, had been loking at the tempestuous passion of grief in the little girl, but when they saw her black dress trimmed with crape they looked in compassion, not in curiosity.

Roma really did not know what to say to this unique child, but only gazed on her with eyes full of love and sympathy.

The sun went down behind the line of mountains toward which they were being rapidly whirled.

The porter came into the car to light the lamps, and the illumination within prevented them from seeing the beauty and brilliancy of the starlight night around them.

They crossed a spur of the Alleghany Mountains without getting a view of their grandeur, and rushed westward into the high-hilled and deep-valed and heavily wooded country in which Goblin Hall is situated.

Owlet went to sleep again.

Many of their fellow passengers dozed in their chairs.

In the sleeping-car ahead of them people were going to bed.

Roma felt too anxious to think of sleeping. The nearer she approached the house where she was to meet Will Harcourt, and hear his vindication—for she was sure that his statement would be a perfect vindication of himself—the more restless and impatient she became. She had only written her letter to him on the day before her journey. She knew that he could scarcely yet have received it, and that if he should start for Goblin Hall immediately on the receipt of her summons it must be from twelve to eighteen hours yet before he could arrive there. Yet, still, she was impatient to get to the end of her journey, as if she expected to meet him then and there.

It was nine o'clock when they reached Pine Hill Junction, where they left the main line for the little train that passed Goeberlin in its course.

Owlet woke up to change cars, but went to sleep

again as soon as they were settled in their new seats, and slept until they reached Goeberlin, at ten o'clock.

There she woke up, bright and alert, and seized the dog basket, with her precious bull pup.

It was very dark at the little station, only one light showing itself from the front of the small ticket office and waiting-room.

"Pompous Pirate" was there with the old family carriage, and "Puck" with a farm wagon.

He left his steady horses and came up to the train as it stopped.

"All well, Pompous?" inquired Roma, as she handed Owlet down to the astonished negro, and then stepped to the platform.

"Perfec'ly well, mist'ess. Who' chile dis yere?"

"A little friend of mine. Here, take these checks, and get our baggage," said Roma, who had loaded herself with two bags, an umbrella and a shawl.

"Dere, gimme dem fings, too, an' yo' go inter de station, mist'ess. I'll 'ten' to all dese."

Roma gave up her burdens, including Owlet's dog basket, and led Owlet up and down the platform to benefit by the balmy evening air.

The train moved off on its westward journey and left them there.

So prompt was Pompous that in less than fifteen minutes he came up and said:

"All yeady to go now, mist'ess."

Roma followed him to the end of the platform at which the carriage stood—because it could come no nearer—and entered it.

Pompous lifted the child in, shut the door, mounted to his seat on the box, and started his horse.

Puck followed with all their baggage, in the wagon, and so they drove on under the starlit sky, along the five-mile road, up and down the heavily wooded hills and dales that lay between Goeberlin and Goblin Hall.

Roma looked out as they approached the house, but she could only see the dim outline of the roof and walls and three or four bright lights gleaming through the windows, upstairs and down.

When the carriage stopped before the front the door was opened, showing the interior of the lighted hall and the tall, solemn figure of "Serious," standing on the threshold.

Owlet was now so sound asleep that she had to be lifted from the carriage and carried into the house, in the arms of Pompous.

"Do not wake the child, if you can possibly help it. Lay her on the broad lounge in the parlor," said Roma as she stepped from the carriage.

"How do you do, Ceres?" she cheerfully inquired of the kill-joy who stood there to receive her.

"Fanky, miss, I do as well as I kin in sich a mis'able worl' as dis. An' how do yo' do yo'se'f? An' so yo's got home sabe, w'ich is mo' dan I looked fo'. An' did Mis'er and Missis Gray an' de chillun get drowned at sea, goin' to furrin countries?"

"Oh, no. They arrived safe, and were all quite well when I heard from them, a week ago."

"Well, dat's mo' dan I 'spected, too," said Serious, in the tone of saying, "And more than they deserved."

"Well, come in, young mist'ess, or yo'll be gettin' ob yo' deaf ob col'."

"What! On this fine April night?"

"Ap'il weader is 'ceitful, young mist'ess—moughty 'ceitful," said the sorrowful philosopher, as she opened the door of the oak parlor, where a pleasant fire was burning and a neat supper table was set.

An armchair was placed near the hearth. A broad lounge stood against the wall, and on it lay Owlet, fast asleep.

Pompous had left the room to help Puck to bring in the baggage and to stable the horses.

"I do not think I want supper, Ceres," said Roma, as she drew off her gloves, took off her bonnet, and sank down into the armchair.

"An' now who de name ob de Lor' is dis chile?" demanded Serious, for the first time noticing Owlet.

"A little girl whom I'm going to take care of for a while," answered Roma.

"Whose chile is she, den, shove off on to yo' mist'ess?"

"She is an orphan."

"Oh, Lor'! I hope yo' ain't gwine to 'dop' her, young mist'ess."

"Unless her grandmother, who is a wealthy English woman, should claim her, I certainly shall."

"Oh, Lor' young mist'ess! Yo' doane know wot yo's a-doin' ob! Raisin' udder people's chillun! Oh, Lor'! She gwine be a heap o' trouble, 'deed she is. Heap o' trouble. She gwine to hab de measles, an' de scarlet feber, an' de whoopin' cough, an'—an'—an'—all dem dere. Oh, young mist'ess, sen' her to de 'sylum."

"I must put her to bed. Is there a fire in my bedroom?"

"Sartin, ma'am. But yo' gwine to put dat chile inter yo' own bedroom?"

"Yes, and into my bed. She has slept with me ever since her poor mother died. Now take a candle and light me upstairs," said Roma, as she tenderly lifted the child from the lounge and carried her out.

Serious, moaning and groaning, and predicting all sorts of calamities from the presence of the unconscious child, went up before her mistress and opened the bedroom door.

Roma laid the child on the outside of the bed and began to undress her so softly and deftly that Owlet never fully waked up, but only sighed with relief at being able to stretch out her tired limbs.

"Open that bag on the floor and give me the little nightdress out of it," said the lady.

Serious groaned, and obeyed.

And Roma, having gently slipped the dainty white cambric gown on the small sleeper, turned down the bed and tenderly laid the little one within it.

Then she dismissed Serious for the night, and disrobed, and retired to rest, and—thanks to the day's fatiguing journey—she also, notwithstanding her anxiety, sank to sleep.

"Oh! oh! oh!"

These words were the first sounds heard by Roma

when she awoke on the morning after her arrival at Goblin Hall.

She looked up, and saw little Owlet standing, in her white nightgown, at the front window, which, with her usual innocent assurance, she had taken the liberty to open.

"Well, little one, up so early?" said Roma cheerfully.

"Oh, look! look! look! Did you ever? Did you ever? Did you ever?" exclaimed Owlet, in a rapture of delight, not once turning her eyes from the something that entranced her.

Surprised at this outburst of wild enthusiasm from the usually grave and non-admiring child, Roma stepped out of bed and went to the window.

She saw nothing unusual there, only the sunlit heavens and earth, the deep blue sky, with a few soft white clouds, the green, wooded hills and vales, and, nearer the house, gently sloping uplands covered with orchards of apple, peach and cherry trees in full blossom, making a forest of pink and white and red bloom; and just under the window the newly set flower beds, with the early spring crocuses, pansies, violets, tulips, jonquils, daffodils and hyacinths, just breaking into bloom.

Yet Roma understood that to the city child all this must seem enchanting.

"Oh, it's like heaven! Isn't it like heaven? Isn't it the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve used to live? Oh! I could just jump out of the window into it all! Oh! I must put on my clothes and run out into it all! I must! I must! I must! George Thomas is asleep in his basket."

And she dressed herself more quickly than she had ever done in her life, and, without thinking of asking leave, she darted downstairs and out of the front door.

For a few minutes Roma watched her from the window, doubtful lest the little savage might not, in her eagerness to possess herself of some of these marvel-

ous treasures, root up and trample down Pompous Pirate's parterres.

But, no. Roma was surprised and pleased to see the effect their beauty had upon the child, how she suddenly stood still and looked down on the budding daffodils, how tenderly she touched them with the tips of her fingers.

Roma called to her:

"Catherine!"

She looked up, her face full of light.

"Do you want to pull some of those flowers?"

"Oh, no! no! no! I wouldn't hurt the darling things for the whole world! Oh, do put on your clothes and come down and see the sweet things close by!" she exclaimed.

But now another figure appeared upon the scene—Pompous Pirate, with a large watering-pot. Seeing the child on the edge of his parterre, he naturally enough feared damage to his treasures.

"Wot yo' doin' yere, long o' my f'owers, little missis?" he demanded, rather crossly.

"Looking at them," answered Owlet, with the light of joy fading from her face.

"Well, min', now, doane yo' pull none o' dem! Doane yo' do it! I woane 'low no chillun to 'buse my f'owers. Year me good, doane yo'?"

"If you think I would hurt the dear things you are not possessed of common sense," said Owlet indignantly, as she turned and entered the house.

Roma soon joined her in the oak parlor, where the breakfast table was set. Roma had not witnessed the scene between the child and the gardener, for she had turned away from the window at the moment the man had appeared with his watering-pot; and now she was too much occupied with thoughts of an impending interview with Will Harcourt to think of asking Owlet why she had left the flowers so soon.

Owlet, on her part, was no telltale, and so Roma never knew how the child had been offended by the servant.

Will Harcourt might be expected some time to-day.

If there had been no delay in the mail, if her letter had reached him on time, and if he had acted promptly on it, and started on the journey to Goblin Hall, he might reach Goeberlin by the eleven o'clock train.

When Ceres came in with the breakfast tray Roma said:

"I wish you to send Pontius to me."

A few minutes later, while the lady and the child were seated at breakfast, the man came in.

"I wish you to go with the carriage to meet the eleven o'clock train at Goeberlin. I expect a visitor," she said.

"An' ef de wisitor doane come by dat train, mus' I wait fo' de fo' train?" inquiren the man.

"No, you must come back; and in that case I will send Puck to meet the four," said Roma, who knew one weakness of her factotum, and did not wish to expose him to temptation by allowing him to remain in reach of strong drink for five idle hours in the village.

That morning Roma could settle herself to nothing. So she gave herself up to the pleasure of the child, and walked with her through the old-fashioned garden, with its affluence of rose bushes, shrubs, vines, and flowers of every description, though only the earliest were now in bloom, with its many sorts of sweet herbs and its many small fruits, the whole garden fenced in by a thick hedge of raspberry bushes, now in full blossom.

Owlet looked at them with amazed delight, turning her enchanted eyes from the white blooming hedge of raspberry bushes to the white blossoming bed of strawberry vines, and murmuring softly to herself:

"Oh, what glory! what glory! what glory!"

Roma could walk beside her and take care of her, but could scarcely enter into sympathy with her. Her anxiety grew more and more intense and absorbing as the morning wore on toward the hour at which she might expect the return of the carriage with Will Harcourt. That would, at the latest, be at half-past twelve.

She had ordered dinner to be ready as early as two o'clock, thinking that would be better than a luncheon for the tired traveler.

At twelve o'clock she led little Owlet back to the house, and leaving the child to amuse herself with her pup, sat down at one of the front windows that commanded a view of the avenue leading to the house, to watch for the approach of the carriage.

Presently she saw the carriage coming. All her powers of self-control could not lessen the violent beating of heart and brain, or dispel the cloud that came over her sight, or still the tremor of her whole frame.

She left the window and hurried to the door.

The carriage drove up the avenue and drew up before the house.

There was no one in it!

For a moment the strong woman grew faint with disappointment and dark foreboding, but with an effort she recovered herself, and recollected that he might yet come by the 4 P.M. train, or even by the 10 P.M. The coachman got down from his box and said:

"Dere wasn't nobody at all got out'n de keers at Goeberlin, mist'ess."

"Did you remember to call at the post office?" inquired the lady.

"Sartin, mist'ess, an' fetched dis letter—on'y one letter, an' no papers nor pamfits. W'ere did I put dat letter ag'in?" inquired the man, in perplexity, as he searched pocket after pocket in vain, while Roma stood waiting—consuming with anxiety.

"Oh, yere it is, arter all, in de linin' ob my hat!" exclaimed Pompous, finding the letter and handing it to his mistress.

She knew the handwriting. It was Will Harcourt's. It was the first communication he had made to her since that night of their wedding day, when he had left her on the threshold of their home at Guyon Manor House to attend Hanson to the boat, as she thought, but after which he was mysteriously lost to

her and to all her friends, until he had suddenly appeared at Lone Lodge. And even this communication had only been made on her own demand.

What would it be? Was he coming to her, and when? What would he say? Would she get to the root of the mystery which had separated them, and thrown her, bound and captive, into the hands of Hanson?

These thoughts rushed tumultuously through her mind as she seized the letter, hurried upstairs to her own room, locked the door, threw herself into a chair, tore open the envelope, and read:

"LADY: I cannot come. I cannot explain. I am accursed from your presence forever, into the outer darkness of absence and silence. W. H."

Roma gazed at these lines in a trance of amazement.

What could they mean? What was the mystery?

Still she could think no evil of him. It seemed impossible for her to do so.

"This is the worst of all," she said; "this is the very worst of all. My poor Will is insane. I can no longer hide the truth from myself. Insane, and under some strange delusion of which that villain Hanson took advantage. Oh, Heavenly Father!" she moaned, as a dark cloud of despair gathered over her spirit, "help him in his great need, and help me! I must not break down now. I must be strong. Yes, I must be strong, and—patient."

CHAPTER X

A MISSING YACHT

IN New York yachting circles there had been much wonder and speculation as to the whereabouts of William Hanson's fine, fast-sailing cutter, the *Roma*, for

nothing authentic had been heard of the yacht or her owner since the last week in the preceding November, when she was reported to have sailed from Washington for the Isle of Storms.

Many conflicting rumors were afloat concerning her and him, some to the effect that he had sailed for the Mediterranean, others that he had gone to the Caribbean Sea; and still others that he was cruising off the coast of South America.

All agreed that the irresponsible young fellow had really gone off to "parts unknown," without taking the trouble to advise any one of his intended destination.

His stepmother and her family were so accustomed to his eccentric movements and utter negligence of all domestic ties, that they scarcely gave the matter a thought, very indifferently taking it for granted that he knew how to take care of himself, and that he was perfectly safe—somewhere!

But they were all wrong—sportsmen, friends and family.

To go back a little.

When Hanson recovered from his intoxication, to find his captive flown, and himself made a prisoner of the elements on the Isle of Storms, entirely cut off from communication with all the rest of the world by the loss of the boats, which had been carried away in the terrible tornado of November 17th, he felt a certain grim sense of humor in the irony of a blind fate that had reversed his condition from that of a jailer to that of a captive.

He laughed bitterly to think how completely he was caught in his own trap.

He knew, however, that his captivity would be but temporary; that the captain of his yacht had orders to bring her down to the Isle of Storms, so as to arrive there by the twenty-fifth of November, then only about one week off.

So Hanson bore his penance as well as he could under the circumstances, looking forward to the time when his white-winged sea swan should be seen off

the isle, and he should go on board and sail away—not, indeed, to the Orient, wi the beautiful Roma Fronde as his bride, but to Washington, to claim her as his wife, and to demand her surrender by the friends who might have her under their protection; for he was firmly determined to resist to the extremity all attempts that might be made to have the fraudulent marriage set aside.

His sanguine temperament enabled him not only to hope for but to confide in the certainty of ultimate success.

He had legally married her against all the odds of fate and fortune, he told himself. Why, then, should he not hold her as his wife, in spite of her friends, her lawyers, and herself?

He made up his mind, and persuaded himself that he could have her, and would have her, and assuredly should have her. And then, like the Sybarite that he was, he resolved to make the best of his situation on the isle for the week or ten days he might have to remain there, and instead of moping and repining, to "eat, drink, and be merry."

He was not an ill-tempered man, except on the rare occasions when he came under the influence of wine, very little of which sufficed to dethrone his reason and excite him to violence and vindictiveness. He never was even irritable, except when recovering from such excesses. At other times his manner, at least, was amiable.

As Roma Fronde had said of him, he was not a Moloch, but a Belial; not a lion, but a serpent.

After that first and only outbreak of fury on the day of Roma's departure, he never again threatened or frightened the two poor old negroes, who were now his only companions, as well as his only attendants. He contented himself with keeping them pretty busy waiting on him, and amused himself with jesting and jeering at them, and playing practical jokes at their expense, a course which made the poor creatures' lives for the time being a burden to them.

"It's fo' our sins, 'Rusalem, honey! It's fo' our sins

as we is 'libered ober to be tormented fo' a season by de han's ob de ebil one," Wilet was accustomed to say.

"Dat's so, chile—dat's yeally so—but ef de Lor' on'y spar's my libe 'til dis young man go 'way f'om yere, I'll try fo' to be a better nigger, I will," Jerusalem would answer; and once he added, with emphasis, "Yes, indeed, I will, fo' sho."

"Yes, yo' will, fo' sho; but will yo' do it fo' true? Dat's wot I wan' to know," Wilet said, with unfeeling irony.

"Now, chile, yo' oughtn' fo' to take yo' ole 'panion up so short dat a-way," he complained.

"'Deed, so I oughtn'; but, fac' is, we's bof been penned up yere in dis islan' long ob dis aggrawatin' young marster tell we's bof gettin' Ole Sam inter us. Leastways, I know I is," Wilet confessed.

But the end of their trial drew near.

One fine morning, near the last of November, as Hanson stood on the brow of the crest, in front of the Mansion House, with his spyglass in his hand, he sighted his pretty yacht making directly for the island.

As soon as he had satisfactorily identified her as his own craft he hastened into the house, quickly gathered his outlying "traps" together, and stuffed them into his valise, rang for 'Rusalem, and ordered him to take it down to the hall, with his umbrella, rug, pistol box, cigar case, and other effects. His trunk had been packed for several days, but it must wait for stronger muscles than Hanson's own or old 'Rusalem's, or both united, to move its weight down the stairs.

"Gwine away, young marse?" inquired the old man in a tone that he tried his best to make regretful, as he stood, laden like a hall hat-tree, with many goods and chattels.

"Yes. Didn't you see that sail coming down the bay? That's my yacht. She is coming for me. I am going off by her to-day."

"'Deed, I's moughty sorry to year yo' say dat, young marse."

"You old hypocrite!" laughed Hanson, who was in the best of humor at the near approach of his deliverance from captivity on the isle. "You know very well that you are glad to get rid of me."

"'Deed, de bressed Lor' knows I is mons'rous sorry to part long ob yo', my young marse—I is fo' sho—I means fo' true I is," 'Rusalem declared, not untruthfully, for his affectionate heart began to yearn over the young fellow, who had only given him great offense on one occasion—"W'en he were bit obercomed 'long ob too much wine," as he put it. So he was sorry for the moment, and would not then confess to himself what a relief the departure of Hanson would be to himself and his "ole woman, Wilet."

He took his load of small baggage below, piled it in the hall, and then went to tell the news to Wilet, whom he found standing at the kitchen table, making rolls to put in the oven for breakfast.

"Yo' see dat dere wessel off yonner to de norf, p'intin' dis yere way?"

"Yes—wot ail me not to see it? I been watchin' ob it eber since I been stan'in' at de table yere, 'fo' de windy, makin' my yoles. Wot 'bout it?"

"Heap 'bout it. Dat dere wessel 'longs to de young marster, an' it comin' yere to fetch him 'way. He gwine 'way to-day. He packin' yup now. Wot yo' fink ob dat?"

"Is dat so?" gravely inquired Wilet.

"Yas! Aine yo' glad?"

"Y—a—s—course—I is," hesitatingly replied the woman.

"Dere! I knowed it! Yo' aine g'ad! Yo' aine no mo' g'ad nor I am, on'y yo' doane wan' to 'fess it," chuckled 'Rusalem.

"Well, po' fellow, yo' see; but anyways it's better fo' 'im to go. He were a moughty deal ob trouble an' 'sponsibility," Wilet said.

"Ef I was yo' I wouldn' be finkin' 'bout dat at dis hour ob partin'," Jerusalem remarked.

Before Wilet could defend herself from the implied rebuke the bell rang, and 'Rusalem hastened to answer it.

He found Hanson standing in the hall.

"Go and hoist the signal, so that my sailing master may know where to send out a boat."

"Young marse, de signal pol' don been carried 'way long ob de stohm dat night w'en de boats an' de boat'-ouse went; but ef yo' can fin' de f'ag I can put it up lon' ob a clo'es prop, or sumhows."

Without a word Hanson turned and fled upstairs, and soon came down again, with the red flag in his hand.

'Rusalem went around to the rear of the house, and brought from the shed one of Wilet's long clothesline props. Hanson joined him, and together they went down to the broken pier, dug a hole in the sand, planted the pole, and hoisted the signal.

The yacht was now within a quarter of a mile of the island.

After fixing the signal Hanson stood with his small telescope at his eye, watching her. After a while he turned his glass toward Snowden, and started as he saw crossing from that point a large rowboat.

In the eight days that had passed since the storm had carried off the island boats, and made him a prisoner there, no boat had come from the mainland, nor was one expected or hoped for, as there was really nothing to bring the dwellers on the shore to the Isle of Storms at this season of the year.

What, therefore, should bring the strange boat on the very morning of the arrival of the *Roma?*

While he was speculating on this question a horn blew from the direction of the house.

This had been Wilet's method of summoning people who were out of hearing of the bell, to come to the meal that was then ready.

"It's breakfas', young marse. Breakfas' is yeady," suggested 'Rusalem.

"And I am ready for breakfast," gayly replied the

young man, as he shut up his glass and put it in his pocket.

"Yo's gwine fo' to leabe us, so I year 'Rusalem say, young marse," remarked Wilet, as she stood at the head of the table, ready to pour out his coffee.

"Yes; are you not delighted to hear it?" he inquired, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Now dat dere is a wery s'archin' question, young marse. But I do say, fo' de trufe, I'm not zactly 'lighted as yo're gwine 'way; but same time I doane deny as yo' sartinly was a g'eat 'sponsibility to me an' 'Rusalem, 'specially sence dat dere night w'en yo' was—was—was—tuk so ill, wid no way ob gettin' ob a doctor to yo'. No, sah, no way. But as yo' gwine, young marse, I hopes, I des, as yo' do well, an' make up long ob de young mist'ess, an' let wine 'lone—w'ich she woone put up wid, as yo' see yo'se'f. An' I hope yo' bofe will lib togedder in lub, an' sometimes come yere to see de ole p'ace in de p'easant summer time."

"Thank you, Wilet. I, too, hope we shall," he answered as he took the cup of coffee from her hand.

Hanson hurried with his breakfast, yet he had scarcely finished when old Jerusalem came in and said:

"Sah, dere is two boats at de lan'in', an' de men out'n bofe is comin' to de house. Is I to denounce dem inter de drawin'-room or inter de kitchen?"

"I will go out and meet them on the porch," said Hanson, rising.

He reached the hall door, which 'Rusalem attentively stepped before and opened for him, just as the first men came up—two sailors in the light blue uniform of the *Roma*.

They touched their caps and stood at "attention."

"How are you, Coote? How are you, Reeves?" said Hanson, recognizing both; and then, without waiting for answer, he said: "Just follow this old man upstairs, and bring down the trunk he will show you, and take it down to the boat. Jerusalem, show these men the way to my room, and then follow them to the boat with this smaller luggage."

The old negro beckoned the sailors, and conducted them to the upper floor, while Hanson turned to meet the stranger, who had now reached the house, and was stepping upon the piazza.

"You are Mr. Hanson?" inquired the stranger, who held a long envelope in his hand.

"That's my name," replied the young man.

"Mr. William Hanson?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

Without replying, the stranger handed him the long envelope.

Hanson took it, and drew from it a folded paper, which he opened, and found to be a notice summoning him to appear as a respondent in the suit entered by Roma Fronde for the setting aside of the fraudulent marriage ceremony that had been, without her own knowledge and consent, performed between herself and William Hanson.

"Quite right," said the young man, with a light laugh. I see what it is. I expected this. It has come in good time to enable me to appear promptly and put a stop to the antics of my lunatic wife and her scoundrelly counsel. This is Thursday. The hearing is set for Monday next. I shall have ample time. Sir, I would ask you to enter the house with me and take refreshments; but, as you see, I am just going away. However, if you will kindly accept the hospitalities of Guyon Hall at the moment of its master's enforced departure, my servants are at your orders, and will make you comfortable."

"Thank you, Mr. Hanson. I always feel quite at hame in the old house, having known it and its proprietor from youth up. I will go in and taste some of old Aunt Wilet's applejack or cherry bounce. Don't let me detain you," said the officer.

And with a bow he passed the usurper and crossed the threshold.

Hanson stepped after him, and took his ulster from the peg and drew it on.

'Rusalem came downstairs, followed by the two sail-

ors, bringing the heavy trunk, which they carried out of the house.

'Rusalem gathered up the smaller baggage and went after them.

Hanson had just finished buttoning up his ulster, and was drawing on his gloves, when Wilet made her appearance through the back door, complaining:

"Lor's a-massy on me, young marse, wot I done to yo' fo' yo' to be gwine 'way 'dout biddin' a body good-by?"

"I was not going to do anything of the sort. Besides, I have left you some tokens of my regard which you will find up in my room—a dozen or so of assorted mufflers, silk and worsted, of all colors, as many large linen or silk pocket handkerchiefs, a half bushel of mixed gloves, socks, slippers, etc. These last you may not be able to wear, but the mufflers and the handkerchiefs will be beauty and joy to you forever. And here—here is something to get you a winter outfit." With this, he handed her a twenty-dollar gold piece, which took away her breath. The scamp, bad as he was, could be liberal, perhaps because he had more money than he knew what to do with.

"Now I yeally do t'ank yo', a hundred t'ousand times, young marster!" she fervently exclaimed.

"One time will do. Now, good-by. Don't let your husband tyrannize over you."

"Him! Po' ole 'Rusalem? He! he! he!" laughed the woman. "He knows better 'an to 'tempt it! W'y, he'd no mo' dare to get 'toxified an' carry on dan he'd heave hisse'f inter de fire! 'Deed, ef ebber I cotched him at sich I'd make him fink de debil had got him sho. He taranize ober me! He! he! he! Yo' make me laugh, young marster. Not but wot I lubs an' 'specks 'Rusalem. He is one good, true ole man. Dat he is."

"I don't doubt it. Good-by."

"Good-by, young marse. Gib my lub to young mist'ess w'en yo' sees her, sah."

"All right. Good-by!" said Hanson, for the last time, as he hurried out of the house and ran gayly

down the hill, whistling an air from "The Marriage of Figaro."

At the landing he found the boat already laden with his luggage, and 'Rusalem waiting to see him off.

"Here, old man!" he called, and the patriarchal negro came up, and took off his hat.

"Here is a token of my deep regard for you," he said, and put a double eagle into 'Rusalem's hand.

The old negro bowed very profoundly, but said nothing. Such munificence deprived him of the power of speech for the moment.

"Now, good-by. And here! Harken to a little parting advice. Don't you let your wife tyrannize over you."

'Rusalem drew himself up with all the dignity of a "lord of creation."

"Who, sah?" he demanded. "Wilet? No, sah! Wilet know her dooty too well, sah. I is de sup'eem yuler in my fambly, sah. Wilet no mo' fink ob yunnin' 'way offen de islan' 'dout my leabe, dan she would jump inter de sea. No, sah! She knows wot she'd cotch ef she did! No, sah. I's lord an' marster ob dat 'oman! Yes, sah, I is fo' sho—I mean fo' true."

Hanson laughed to think how utterly dependent was this sable and self-deceived "supreme ruler" on his wife, for counsel, assistance, and everything else he needed.

"T'ank yo' berry much, sah, fo' yo' moneyifficence, an' likewise yo' good 'vice. Gib my dooty to de young madam, sah."

"I will," said Hanson as he stepped into the boat.

The men laid themselves to their oars, and, rowing swiftly, soon cleared the distance between the island and the yacht.

The captain was standing on the deck to welcome the owner.

"Glad to see you, sir!" he exclaimed.

"So am I to see you, Gamble," Hanson answered, as he reached his side.

"But where is the bonny bride?"

"Oh, she is with friends in Washington. I am going to her now."

"And not to the Mediterranean?"

"Yes, afterward. But, Gamble, what is the meaning of those clouds rising in the west? They have a strange, uncanny look."

"Yes, sir, they have. They indicate ugly weather. I was just thinking we had better run into Snowden Inlet and anchor for the night."

"Nonsense! The *Roma* can weather any storm that could ever rise. We must sail for Washington immediately. I have no time to lose."

"The impatience of a young husband is excusable," laughed the captain, and he went forward and gave the necessary orders—fatal orders, they proved to be!

The *Roma* sailed away from the Isle of Storms, and that was the last seen or heard of her, or of her owner, for many days.

I must be brief here.

The terrible storm struck them at midnight, near the mouth of the bay. The small crew worked and struggled heroically with wind and waves, but to no purpose.

The *Roma* foundered at sea.

Hanson, his captain and crew barely escaped with their lives by taking to an open boat, in which they were tossed about all night in the tempest, and from which, when it was about to break up under them, they were picked up by a merchant ship, bound from Baltimore to San Francisco.

Thus it happened that while Hanson's friends were speculating as to what course his pleasure cruise on the *Roma* had taken, the yacht was at the bottom of Chesapeake Bay, and her owner, with all her crew, was bound on a long, compulsory voyage around Cape Horn, and was suffering the tortures of the damned through seasickness, cold, wet, exposure and deathly peril.

It was not until the first week in April that the ship reached San Francisco.

Hanson had not a cent of cash with him, but he had boundless credit. By this he obtained money enough to pay off his captain and crew and to make preparations to return to Washington by the overland route as fast as steam, by day and night, could carry him.

All through his long journey the question that racked him was:

How should he find Roma?

CHAPTER XI

ON HER TRACK

Hanson, having traveled day and night, reached Washington city on the morning of April 15th.

Naturally inferring that Amos Merritt, her late guardian, and her counsel, would be the most likely to know Roma's present abode, Hanson only took time to engage a room at an East End hotel, change his clothes and eat his breakfast, before he threw himself into a hack and drove to the old lawyer's office.

On entering, and inquiring of the clerk in the anteroom, he was told that Mr. Merritt was in his private office, and alone.

Declining the clerk's offer to take in his card, Hanson went and turned the knob of the communicating door and entered the rear room.

Mr. Merritt was sitting in his leather armchair, before his desk, not writing, but leaning back and reading the morning paper. It was still early, and he had not settled to the day's work.

He looked up on hearing the unannounced entrance of the visitor, probably taking him to be one of the clerks, coming on official business, as they frequently did.

On recognizing Hanson he started, flushed purple with indignation, and then, without laying aside his paper or rising from his chair, he demanded:

"To what cause, sir, may I attribute the insult of this intrusion?"

Hanson possessed much cool self-control, and more dignity than he had any moral right to show.

He took a chair, and seated himself, without leave, and with quiet insolence, and replied:

"I have come to inquire for my wife. Where is she?"

"Your—wife, fellow? What wife? How should I know anything about your wife? I was not even aware that you had set up a wife. May I ask what misguided woman was idiot enough to marry you? Accept my congratulations," said the lawyer dryly.

"You know very well, sir, that I allude to your former ward, Miss Roma Fronde, who became my wife on the fifteenth of last November," Hanson said with cool insolence.

"Or, rather, whom you sought to marry, without her knowledge or consent, by the basest fraud that ever was practiced upon human being. That fraudulent marriage ceremony was set aside by the courts as illegal, therefore null and void," Mr. Merritt explained.

"That was a pity, for the lady's sake, even more than for mine, when it is remembered that she went with me as my bride to the Isle of Storms," Hanson said.

"She went to her own house, sir. To the house of which she was the heiress and the mistress. You stole into that house without her knowledge or consent, like a sneak thief at midnight. You afterward broke into her room like a murderous burglar. She had you at her mercy. Your life was in her hands, at her disposal. You had forfeited your life to her by every human law. Yet she did not take it. She spared you for the Lord's sake. Without hurting you she escaped. She saved herself."

"Who will believe that?" scornfully inquired Hanson. "Really, Mr. Merritt, if the court has decided that the rites by which Roma Fronde and myself were united were informal, illegal, I think their decision

is very compromising to the lady, who lived with me as my wife for——"

"Get out of my office, you low beast, before I pitch you out of the window!" exclaimed the lawyer, starting to his feet, and growing purple in the face. "Go!" Hanson went.

He had no wish for a personal encounter with the stalwart old lawyer, even if it had not been possible to end in breaking his own neck out of a three-story window.

He next drove to the West End Hotel, where Roma and her friends had been in the habit of stopping while in Washington. Here he wisely inquired for the lady by her maiden name, knowing full well that she had never acknowledged his.

"Miss Fronde?" repeated the office clerk. "Yes, sir, she was here with the Grays, last November. Mr. Gray was appointed consul to Delicome, and sailed for Liverpool about the twenty-second of the month, I think."

"Did Miss Fronde accompany them?"

"No, sir. She went to the new apartment house on the Mount Pleasant Road—the Wesleyan Flats. She was there for some time, I know. She may be there yet," added the clerk.

"Thank you for the information," said Hanson, and he left the hotel, re-entered his hack, and gave the order:

"To the Wesleyan Flats."

Twenty minutes' drive brought him to the building.

He got out and entered the hall, the door of which stood open.

"Can you tell me whether Miss Fronde is staying here at present?" he inquired of our friend Tom, who was on duty there as hall porter.

"She dun lef' mo' 'an a week ago," answered the boy.

"Where has she gone?"

"Dun know. Down de country somewhurse. She writ it on a keerd an' guv me, but mammy's got it, an' I's forgot.

"Can I see the landlord?"

"I dun know nuffin 'bout no lan'lor'. Yo' kin see Missis B'own, I yeckon. She 'ten's to eberyfing."

"Then take my card to Mrs. Brown," Hanson said, handing over the slip of pasteboard.

The boy disappeared within the elevator, which was about to rise to the upper regions.

Hanson walked up and down the hall for about five minutes, at the end of which time Tom reappeared with a message to the effect that Mrs. Brown would see the visitor.

Hanson followed the boy to the elevator, which rose to the top floor of the house, on which Mrs. Brown's "sky parlor" was located. It was a plainly furnished room, with a Kidderminster carpet, horsehair chairs and sofa, and windows overlooking the whole city, the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, and the wooded hills of Maryland and Virginia.

Mrs. Brown, the same stout, compact woman of medium height, with fresh complexion, black eyes and black hair, clothed in a dark woolen suit, as I have before described her, rose from her chair and came forward with outstretched hand to meet the visitor, saying:

"I am very glad to see any friend of Miss Fronde. She endeared herself very much to us all during the four months she remained with us."

"She was here four months, then?"

"Yes, sir. Sit down, pray."

Hanson took a seat and Mrs. Brown resumed her own.

"Miss Fronde was the bosom friend of my sister, and something nearer and dearer still to myself," said Hanson, with an air of claiming the lady as his betrothed. He dared not go further than that then, for he could not know how much or how little this Mrs. Brown might know of Roma's position.

"Oh, indeed, sir!" exclaimed the janitress. "I am delighted to hear it. But how is it that we never saw you here all winter?"

"I have just returned from a long sea voyage, a voyage of many months."

"Ah! And to think Miss Fronde never mentioned your name to me! But then some young ladies are so reserved," said Mrs. Brown meditatively.

"Yes, and she among the most reserved. I expected to find her in Washington, but it appears that she has left the city. Can you tell me where she has gone?"

"Certainly, sir. She has gone to her own country seat in Maryland—Hobgoblin House, I think they call it. But I will tell you who can give you exact information—Lawyer Merritt."

"Humph! He was a great friend of Miss Fronde, I believe?"

"Oh, yes, sir; a very great friend indeed."

"And a frequent visitor?"

"Oh, yes, sir; of course. He had been her guardian and trustee, and he managed all her business for her. But, of course, sir, if you are engaged to the young lady, you know more about these matters than I do," Mrs. Brown added.

"Yes, I did know, but I have been away so long. Many changes may take place in five months," Hanson said, very gravely.

Mrs. Brown broke into a merry little laugh, exclaiming:

"Oh! I see just how it is with you. You are jealous of Miss Fronde's old guardian. Why, sir, you might as well be jealous of her great-grandfather, if she had one."

Hanson took no notice of this innocent raillery, but inquired:

"Did Miss Fronde go alone to Goblin Hall?"

"No, sir."

"Who went with her?" demanded Hanson, turning hot and cold at the thought of Harcourt as her possible companion.

"Not Mr. Merritt, certainly," slyly replied the janitress.

"Who, then? Who, then?" eagerly demanded Hanson.

"A much younger and more attractive companion, of whom the young lady is excessively fond," Mrs. Brown replied, smiling mischievously.

"Who was he?" demanded Hanson, rising from his chair in excitement.

"Who said 'he'? I didn't. There was no 'he' in the case. What are you thinking of, sir?"

"Who went with Miss Fronde to Goblin Hall?"

"A little girl; her adopted child."

"Oh!" exclaimed Hanson, dropping back on his seat in a state of collapse.

"Who did you think had gone with her, sir?" merrily inquired the janitress.

"I did not know what to think. So she has adopted a child, has she?"

"Oh, yes, sir; a bright, quaint, interesting little girl of about five years of age."

"Whose child was it? How came Miss Fronde to adopt it?"

"It was the child of a poor, friendless and destitute young widow, who died of consumption here about two weeks ago. Oh, I must tell you all about that poor woman and her child, and what an angel of mercy Miss Fronde was to them."

Hanson assented, not because he was in the very least degree interested in the objects of Roma's benevolence, but because in hearing them he should hear more of her.

"They occupied a room in the rear of this upper floor—one of the cheapest rooms in the building. There are no registers up as high as this. You see, sir, I have an open grate."

"Well, it is pleasanter," said Hanson.

"Yes, sir, but in those little rooms there were no such things; only little iron stoves, that mostly smoked, being so near the roof. Even for this poor room she could scarcely pay the rent, and only managed to do it by half starving herself, living on bread

and tea. Fancy a young woman in consumption living in such a way as that!"

"Very sad," said Hanson.

"I really do not know what would have become of her if Miss Fronde had not found her out. She took her out of that cold, smoky room, and brought her downstairs to her own luxurious apartments, and made her comfortable there. Miss Fronde had the finest suite of rooms in the building. And then she came to me to see if she could engage commodious rooms for the sick woman and child; but it was in the thick of the season, and there was not a vacant bed, not to say room, in the whole house; and I told her so, and advised her to send the young woman to the Providence Hospital and the child to the orphan asylum. And what do you think she answered me?"

"I am sure I don't know. Something quixotic, no doubt."

"She said—that angel did—'The dying mother and her child are devotedly attached to each other. It would be cruel to separate them now, and it would probably hasten the death of the young woman. Besides, they both cling to me, as to their only friend, in a manner that is very pathetic.'"

"The instinct of self-preservation," said Hanson curtly.

"And then," continued the janitress, "she asked me: 'Mrs. Brown, do you think that you would send your own sister to a hospital, under such circumstances, if you had the means of taking care of her at home?' I was forced to confess that I would not. Then she said: 'No more will I send this poor sister woman away from me while I have, as I certainly now have, the means of taking care of her at home, even though it is but a temporary home.' And then what do you think that angel of yours did, sir?"

"Something equally quixotic, I suppose."

"She gave up her own elegant parlor to the invalid and the child. She supplied them with every possible comfort and luxury. She engaged the best medical attendance the city could supply, and she nursed the

woman herself, both night and day; and not only nursed her, but read to her, talked to her, and entertained and amused her. I do believe she would have taken her to Florida to try to save her life if she had been able to travel. She was all-in-all to that young woman as long as the poor thing lived."

"What detained Miss Fronde so long here?"

"That young woman did. Miss Fronde meant to have gone to the country in December, but the poor, sick creature was not able to travel, so the young lady stayed here with her. The woman got so much better in her new, luxurious quarters, with the skillful medical treatment and the tender nursing and cheerful companionship, that Miss Fronde began to talk about taking her to the country as soon as the spring should open, if she should then be able to travel. And I know that the poor widow looked forward to going there as to going to Paradise. I don't think, however, that there are many young beauties and heiresses spending a winter in Washington who would have given up all society for the sake of nursing a poor, consumptive fellow creature."

"It was very extravagant benevolence," said Hanson.

"So I told her. 'Miss Fronde,' I said, 'if you mean to do for every forlorn human being all that you are doing for this mother and child, you will have your hands full, and need the fortune of Vanderbilt ten times told.'"

"What did she say to that?" inquired Hanson.

"Oh, sir, she looked at me with such a grave, sweet smile, and said:

"'But I am not required to "do" for all the "forlorn." The poor are freely distributed around and about the rich throughout the world. Every one who has the power to relieve is responsible for the suffering that comes under his notice. Just at present I am only required to take care of these two poor, helpless creatures. I do not find them a grievous burden, I assure you. The Lord has not demanded of me more than I can well perform.'"

"How long did this state of things continue?"

"I told you, sir, that the young woman died about two weeks ago. She was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery. Miss Fronde paid all the funeral expenses and adopted the orphan. I have often heard that childless people often love their adopted children as well or better than if they had been born their own. I do think this was the case with Miss Fronde. Young as she was, she took to this little five-year-old orphan as if she had been the widow, and it was her own and only child. Yes, sir, it is wonderful to see. Her heart is just wrapped up in that mite. I really do think it would grieve her to death if she were to lose it. I did wonder at it; but I said to myself it is because she is alone in the world—not knowing anything about her engagement to you, sir, you must recollect."

"When did Miss Fronde leave here for Goblin Hall?"

"Nearly two weeks ago, sir; a few days after the funeral."

"Taking the child with her?"

"Yes, sir. I told you so."

"And no one else?"

"No, sir. I told you that also."

"Had Miss Fronde any visitors while here?"

"No, sir."

"No gentlemen visitors?"

"Now, there you are again! You men are so awfully jealous! No, sir, she had no gentlemen visitors, unless you call her old guardian, who came on business, and the old doctor who attended the sick woman, visitors, and both of them were over sixty years old."

"Did you ever hear Miss Fronde speak of a young gentleman friend of hers, of the name of Harcourt?"

"No, sir, never; nor of no one else—not even of yourself, sir. Miss Fronde, good and kind as she was, was very reserved—very much so, indeed, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Brown," said Hanson, rising, "I am very much indebted to you for all this information. Now I will ask you but one more question, and then

bid you good-morning. Do you think that Miss Fronde intends to keep that child with her at Goblin Hall?"

"Yes, indeed; I don't only think it, I know it. She said so. I hope you will make no objections, sir. It would break her heart to part with that child now, though, of course, after she marries, and has children of her own, she will not be so much wrapped up in it."

"Probably not. Well, good-morning. I am off to Goblin Hall by this evening's express train. Have you any message for Miss Fronde?"

"Please give her my best love and respects, and ask her, if she should visit Washington city on her bridal tour, to be sure to come to stay at this house."

"I will. Good-morning."

Hanson left the room and went down with the elevator to the ground floor, where he entered the restaurant, took a seat at a table, and ordered a lunch.

While he leisurely discussed his oysters and ale he thought over all that he had heard, and formed his plans upon the information.

Harcourt had not reappeared upon the scene of Roma's life. So much was certain. She was alone at Goblin Hall, comforting her lonely heart with the love of her adopted child—some miserable little waif, offspring of some unknown woman, picked up in an apartment house. He did not even know the name of the child or the woman. He could not remember whether the janitress had ever mentioned those names, nor was he sufficiently interested in Roma's protégées to try to recollect.

"Yet, my reader, if Mrs. Brown had chanced to call that mother or child by name Hanson would have been so thunderstruck that he would not have forgotten the circumstances, for, as the personal advertisements say, he would have heard "something to his advantage."

However, this much he knew—that his rival was out of the way, departed for parts unknown; that the Grays were all in Europe; that Roma was at

Goblin Hall, unprotected, except by her own strong self, and alone but for the presence of her pet child and her own servants.

And he determined to go down to see her there, to try to reconcile her to himself; and in the event of her obstinate refusal, to warn her that he should make an appeal to have the decision of the court that set aside their marriage ceremony as illegal reversed in his favor, on the ground of his compulsory absence from the trial. And this appeal he would make in any case. If she should still be obstinate in her determination to repudiate him he would find means to wring her heart so cruelly that she should be compelled to yield to him.

With this resolution he finished his lunch, paid his bill, went back to his hotel, packed up again, and sent off his luggage by express to Goeberlin.

Later he ate dinner, settled with the office clerk, and started for the six-thirty express train to Goeberlin. He caught it, and was soon flying westward on his evil errand.

CHAPTER XII

ROMA'S DESPAIR

Roma strove bravely to resist the dark cloud of despair that was fast settling down upon her soul.

She could not concentrate her thoughts sufficiently to enable her to read or write, and to attempt to knit or to sew was to leave her mind too free to fly to themes which to dwell upon was maddening.

Under these circumstances she devoted herself to Owlet, and found some distraction from her sorrow in the society of that strange child.

She began to teach the little one to read and to sew, and gave two hours of the morning to this pleasant pastime. She found Owlet an apt and eager pupil. After the hours of tuition she would take her to walk over the plantation. She took her through those won-

derful orchards, now in full blossom, that seemed to the child like forests of pink and white flowers. She showed her a pigeon box, with the young pair of pigeons in the nest, and she told her wonderful stories of the carriers.

Owlet enjoyed all this with more intense delight than any child reared among such scenes, or having a less sensitive nature, could have felt.

But through all her own pleasure Owlet perceived the deep trouble on the face of her benefactress, and responded to it for some days in silent sympathy.

At length, one morning, after she had said her lesson in spelling words of three letters, she suddenly demanded, while looking wistfully into the lady's face:

"What is the matter with you?"

Roma looked surprised, then lifted the child to her lap and kissed her in grave silence.

"But what is the matter with you?" again inquired Owlet, with tender, persistent interest.

Still Roma did not answer, but gently caressed the little one. How, indeed, could she answer the question? She could not tell the facts, for the child could not understand them; nor could she use the formula for such cases made and provided, and say: "Nothing is the matter," or "I have a headache," for neither statement would be true, and Roma was too purely truthful to prevaricate.

"Have I hurted you? And are you too kind to scold me? Oh, you know I am very often naughty, and not respectful enough to people; but—but—that is only when—when I'm not possessed of common sense, you know. But, oh, I do love you! And I am so sorry if I hurted you!" Owlet exclaimed, clasping her benefactress around the neck.

"You have not hurt me, darling; you never do," gently replied the lady, returning the caress.

"Don't I? I'm so glad! But somebody has been very wicked to make you so sorry. Who is it? Aunt Serious?"

"No, dear."

"She's awful. I thought it might have been her."

"Oh, no, dear."

"Then was it Uncle Paunchus?"

"No, Owlet."

"He's very aggravating, too, sometimes, you know."

"But he has not displeased me, nor has any one here."

"Then who was it? That is what I want to hear."

"You would not know, dear, if I were to tell you," gently replied the lady.

"Well, if I don't know who it was, I do know one thing," said Owlet.

"What is that, dear?" Roma inquired, with a grave smile.

"I know whoever it was that hurt you is not possessed of common sense, and I would not mind 'em if I was you," concluded Owlet with solemn conviction.

While she spoke, Puck, the mail messenger, entered the room with the mail bag, which he handed to his mistress.

Roma opened the bag and emptied its contents upon the table before her.

There was quite a heap of letters. She hastily looked over their superscriptions and postmarks, and recognized them by their handwriting. There was a letter from her late guardian, Lawyer Merritt, letters from Mr. and Mrs. Gray and from Abbot Elde.

She opened Mrs. Gray's letter first, saw at a glance that the writer and all her family were well, and then laid aside that and all the accompanying foreign letters, to be read at more leisure, and opened Mr. Merritt's letter, which was a very bulky one, for the envelope inclosed two others, one in the handwriting of Margaret Wynthrop, addressed to Amos Merritt, Esq., and the other in that of Reba Bushe, addressed to Mrs. William Harcourt, care of Amos Merritt, Esq.

The lawyer's letter contained only a few lines, to the effect that he forwarded the inclosed, adding a remark that Hanson's stepsister was evidently still in utter ignorance of Roma's true position, and believed her to be the wife of Will Harcourt.

Roma hastened to open and read Miss Wynthrop's

letter, in the hope of hearing some good news of the Harcourts. It was, however, but a short note, seemingly in answer to an inquiring one from the lawyer, and informing him that Mrs. Harcourt's condition remained unchanged, and that Mr. Will Harcourt had left Goblin Hall for the North, but not giving the young man's address, which, by the way, was not known to the writer.

With a deep sigh Roma laid this letter aside and took up that of Reba Bushe.

This also was very short, and somewhat reproachful, complaining that the writer had written at least half a dozen letters to her beloved Roma, addressed to the Isle of Storms, via Snowden, but that she had not received a line in acknowledgment of any one of them; that she was almost discouraged from further attempts to keep up the correspondence between herself and her old schoolmate and bosom friend; but, being on the eve of sailing for Liverpool with her mother, she made this last venture in the hope of hearing from her friend, and should address the letter to the care of Mr. Amos Merritt, who would be likely to know her address in the event that Mr. Harcourt and herself had left the Isle of Storms for some other place. The letter concluded with entreaties for a speedy reply, and assurances of the writer's unchanged and unchangeable affection.

"Poor Reba! Dear Reba! How little she knows of my real position, of the irreparable injury done by her evil stepbrother to Will Harcourt and myself. What must she think of my seemingly selfish neglect of her? And how shall I answer her letter without exposing her brother and giving her the deepest mortification? On the other hand, if I do not write to her, she will think me cold and careless, and that alternative would give her equal pain," Roma said to herself.

Then to the waiting negro boy she said:

"You must be ready to take letters to the afternoon mail. Now you can go."

The boy ducked, and departed.

"Darling," Roma whispered gently to the listening and attentive child, "I have important letters to write, and I cannot take a walk with you to-day. But you may go in the garden and play, if you choose. You will be quite safe there."

The child kissed her benefactress, slid off her lap, and ran out of the house.

Roma opened and read the letters of her relatives from Delfcome. They were full of praises of their new home, new friends, new scenes and new life altogether, and of prayers and petitions to their dear Roma to come out and join them immediately. Nothing but the presence of their beloved Roma was needed to complete their happiness.

Roma read all these letters with the deepest interest, but she answered that of Reba Bushe first. She began by writing:

"Your dear and most welcome letter received to-day is the very first I have had from you, my beloved friend, since parting with you, nearly six months ago, at the steamboat pier in Washington city. I can easily understand why the many letters you have written to me within the last half year, previous to this one, have not reached me. But though I do so well understand this, I cannot explain it to you. I am in deep trouble, almost in despair, yet must not tell you why—at least, not at present. The time may come when all shall be made clear. In the meanwhile, trust me, my beloved friend, and always think of me as your true and loving ROMA.

"That letter," said Roma to herself, "will reveal nothing of which she ought for the present to remain in ignorance. She will think that my dear Will has fulfilled all Aunt Ruth's dark predictions, of which she caught an echo when she was with us before the wedding. She will think that he is insane; and, ah, me! she may not be far wrong. She will be sorry for me, and she will write to me; but, let us see—she must not direct her letters to Mrs. William Harcourt

here. It would be embarrassing; nor can I tell her not to do it without giving her the explanation that it is impossible now to give. I must add a postscript to that letter of mine."

She drew the sheet toward her, and wrote:

"P. S.—Direct all your letters to me under cover to Mr. Amos Merritt, Louisiana Avenue, Washington."

Then she wrote a short note to her late guardian and present attorney, merely saying:

"My old friend, from whom I have no secrets, I reinclose Miss Bushe's letter, with my answer to it. You will readily understand my policy. You will please receive all the letters that she may write to me, and inclose them to me as in this instance. Please mail my letter to Miss Bushe from the Washington post office."

She placed the two letters in the same envelope with this note, and addressed the package to Mr. Merritt.

Having done this, she went to work to answer her foreign letters.

While Roma was so engaged her little protégée, with her double-funnel hat on her head, wandered away into the delightful garden, which, to her apprehension, was a very Garden of Eden.

It was a very large garden, covering quite a quarter of an acre. It was formally laid out in squares, like the streets of the Quaker City. But its luxuriant growth of shrubs and fruit bushes along every walk between vegetable beds, hid all angles. It was entered by a south gate leading to the broad middle walk that ran the full length of the ground to the north wall, which was entirely hidden by a thick hedge of raspberry bushes, now a mass of white blossoms. On the right of the gate, as you entered, in the southeast corner of the wall, was a group of three peach trees, now in full, pink flower. All through the garden, here and there, where they would not inter-

fere with the growth of vegetables or flowers, were isolated fruit trees—pear, quince, apple, plum and cherry trees. In the walks near the house was an affluence of roses over arbors and trellises, and around the edges of the vegetable square, further away, pot herbs and small fruits took the place of the flowers. But now, not only all the spring flowers and all the roses were in bloom, but all the fruit trees and bushes and vines were in full blossom, and the whole garden was one outburst of beautiful color. In the morning the birds sang there in a concert of joy and praise.

But it was now near midday, and they were silent.

Owlet wandered down the middle walk, between the borders of sweet williams, larkspurs, ragged robins, hyacinths, jonquils, daffodils, tulips—and countless varieties of old-fashioned spring flowers, stooping lightly to caress one or another, but never plucking any, and so came at last to the gooseberry bushes, in full bloom, that grew on the borders of a sidewalk on her left.

But it was not the gooseberry bushes that attracted the child. It was what seemed to her to be a flock of little, soft, round, yellow birds running about in the grass, and in and out, under the bars of a wicker coop, in which something was moving and making a gentle noise.

This was, in fact, a coop, with a bantam hen and a brood of newly hatched chickens, which the poultry woman had brought from the poultry yard, for some reason best known to herself, and placed in the gooseberry walk.

But Owlet did not know what they were. Her face grew radiant with delight, and she threw herself on the ground near them.

"Oh, you dear, darling things!" she said, taking the little, round, yellow puffs tenderly in her hand and putting them up to her face. "You sweet, lovely things! I do love you so! You are so sweet, I could eat you!"

"Oh, p'ease, p'ease doane bite 'em! Dey is sich po' itty sings!" pleaded a baby voice near her.

Owlet looked up, and saw a small negro child standing by her side. It was a strange little human—a child of about her own age, but shorter and plumper than she was, with a skin as black as ink, yet, strange as it may seem to say it, beautiful in face, feature and form, with a well-shaped round head, covered with jet black, silky, closely curling hair, large, soft black eyes, deeply fringed on both upper and lower lids, with long, curly black lashes; a small nose, not very flat; a lovely mouth, a perfect Cupid's bow in shape, and dark crimson in color, not too vivid a contrast to the black skin. But, after all, the chief beauty of the little face was its expression of more than human tenderness, of a ray of almost heavenly love. She was clothed in a short garment of blue serge that left her shapely little black arms and legs perfectly bare from shoulders to hands and from knees to feet.

Owlet, however, gave her a mere glance that did not take in the perception of her personality in the least degree, and indignantly exclaimed:

"You are not possessed of common sense. Do you suppose I would hurt these dear, darling little things?"

Surprised at the angry glance and voice of the white child, the little black one looked dazed and dumb for a moment, staring at the speaker; then she softly drew nearer to her, gently laid her hand upon her, and tenderly inquired:

"Is oo sick, 'ittle dirl?"

The first impulse of our small woman was to fly into a passion and demand to know whether the questioner was possessed of common sense. But the heavenly compassion shown on the little black face utterly disarmed and subdued Owlet, so that after gazing for a little while she only inquired:

"What made you think I was sick?"

"I doane know, but I sought oo was, an' I so sowwy fo' oo." And with her little black hand she stroked Owlet's cheek.

"Oh, you darling thing! You are prettier than the flowers and sweeter than the birdies!" said Owlet.

"Dese aine birdies; dey is chickies," said the little negro.

"You are sweeter and prettier than the chickies, then. You darling thing! What is your name?"

"Docky," replied the black child.

"Ducky? Oh, Ducky, I love you! Ducky, darling! Ducky, darling!" exclaimed Owlet, suddenly throwing her arms around the black child and kissing her. "You are a Ducky darling. You shall be my little playmate. Come to the house with me now, and see my dear lady. I want to show you to her, and I want to show her to you, as well. Come," continued Owlet, clasping the hand of the black child and drawing her along.

Dorcas, commonly called Dorky, followed obediently, as she would have followed anybody anywhere on so kind an invitation.

Owlet drew her on out of the garden, into the house, into the oak-paneled parlor, and into the presence of Miss Fronde, who had just finished writing her letters and was putting them into the mail bag.

Roma raised her eyes as the children entered the room hand in hand, and for a moment she thought what a pretty picture they made, standing thus before her; but only for a moment, as Owlet exclaimed:

"Look! This is Ducky Darling. And, oh! isn't she sweet?"

"Why, it is little Dorcas!" exclaimed Roma. "Where did you find her, Catherine?"

"By the chicken coop, in the garden," replied Owlet. "And, oh! ain't she lovely?"

"What were you doing in the garden, Dorcas?" the lady inquired.

"Chickies," briefly answered the little black child.

"Where is your mammy, Dorcas?"

"Doane know."

"Who is Ducky Darling, anyhow? Who is the dear thing?" Owlet inquired, with the deepest interest.

"She is Hera Hutter's child," Roma replied.

"And who is Hera Hutter?" persisted Owlet.

"She is our poultry woman."

"And where does she live?"

"In a little house near the poultry yard," said Roma, as she rang a little hand bell that stood on the table by her side.

Puck answered the bell.

"Go and find Hera, and ask her to come here," said the lady.

The boy went out.

"Catherine, you said that you found Dorcas in the garden, by the chicken coop? Surely you must be mistaken, dear. The chicken coop had no place in the garden," said Roma.

"No, I was not mistaken. I couldn't have been if I had been possessed of common sense. The chicken coop was in the gooseberry walk, and the old hen was in the coop, poor thing! And the chickies were running in and out. And I took the dear, pretty things up in my hands, and Ducky Darling came up and saw me, and was afraid I was going to hurt them, and that was how I found Ducky Darling, the sweet thing!" Owlet said.

At that moment Hera entered the room, courtesied to her mistress, and stood waiting.

The woman was short and plump, with a skin as black as that of her child, with features almost as pretty, and an expression almost as pleasing. She was neatly clothed in a dark blue calico dress, a white apron, white neck handkerchief and white turban. She was the wife of Nace, and the mother of five small children, two older and two younger than Dorcas, and with only one year between each child and its successor.

"I sent for you, Hera, to take charge of your little one here. She ought not to be allowed around the place at large. It is not safe for her," said Miss Fronde, speaking very kindly, as she always spoke when obliged to rebuke her servant.

"Lor', Miss Yoma! She wa'n't yoamin' at no large.

I pit her inside ob de garden gate wid my own han'," Hera replied, smiling.

"But why in the garden?"

"'Caze she c'azy arter dem young chicks."

"Ah! this is what I wish to know. Why did you put the chicken coop into the garden?"

"To keep the little chicks out'n harm's way, Miss Yoma. Yo' know dat ole brack shanky yooster?"

"The shanghai, do you mean, Hera?"

"Dat's him. He so unnateral an' so rawenous, he like to 'a' gobbled up all dem young chicks. He'd 'a' done it, too, ef I hadn't took 'em out'n harm's way an' pit 'em into de garden, in de goozebewwy walk, 'tween de peas an' de beans, whey nobody aine got no call to go dis season ob de yea', w'en none ob dem fings is fit to yeat," Hera explained.

"Well, I suppose you were right. You know your business best. You may go now," Roma said.

Hera courtesied, and took the hand of little Dorcas to lead her away.

"Oh, no! no! Please don't take her back! Let her stay with me!" pleaded Owlet.

"Oh, no, miss. Little colored gals aine comp'ny fo' little w'ite ladies," Hera replied, leading her child away.

"You are not possessed of common sense! Why ar'n't they? What do you mean?" indignantly demanded Owlet.

"Tell her, Miss Yoma, p'ease, ma'am. She woane min' me," said Hera.

"I am not myself sure of what I ought to tell her," said Miss Fronde, with a faint smile. "But, if you have no objection, Hera, you may leave Dorcas for a little while."

"Oh, 'co'se I's no 'jections, Miss Yoma, on'y I doane wan' her to bodder yo'. Min' yo', Dorky, yo' 'have yo'se'f fo' de w'ite ladies, yo' hear?"

"'Es," said the child.

"An' Miss Yoma, p'ease, ma'am, yo' sen' de chile home soon's ebber yo' git tired ob her."

"Very well, Hera."

So the mother went out, leaving the child with Owlet.

And that day they had a glorious time.

Owlet amazed and delighted Ducky Darling with the sight of her picture books and toys, but among them all the little black child was the most enraptured with a small musical box, so that when at length she was claimed to be carried away by her mother, Owlet raised her to the height of bliss by giving her the box.

CHAPTER XIII

A THUNDERBOLT

Early the next morning, when Owlet was taking her usual run in the garden before breakfast, she found the little black child in the gooseberry walk, sitting down by the chicken coop.

"Oh, Ducky Darling, I am so glad to see you again!" Owlet cried.

"Chickies," replied the child, with a broad smile.

"Oh, yes; they are such dear, sweet things! Everything is sweet, Ducky Darling, isn't it?"

"'Es."

A bell rang.

"There's the breakfast bell. I must go into the house. Won't you come in and have some breakfast?" Owlet inquired.

"B'ekfus' 'lon' o' mammy," said Dorcas.

"Oh! You mean you have had yours?"

"'Es. B'ed an' mi'k an' 'lasses."

"Oh, what a nice breakfast! Well, I will go now, but I will run out again before I sit down to my lessons. You stay here and wait for me."

"'Es. Chickies."

Owlet ran into the house and joined her benefactress at the breakfast table, which was set near the open windows, through which the morning air came, laden with the scent of hyacinths.

"Lady," began Owlet.

"Why don't you call me aunty, dear?" inquired Miss Fronde.

Owlet looked at her solemnly, and replied:

"If any one but you had asked me such a question I should say they were not possessed of common sense."

"But—why?" Roma questioned.

"'Cause you are not an auntie. The old colored people are aunties, but you are a young white lady."

"I stand rebuked. What were you about to say to me, ma'am, when I was so rude as to interrupt you?" inquired Roma.

"I was going to ask you if you wouldn't please let Ducky Darling learn lessons along with me."

This seemed rather a startling proposal, but a suggestive one. There were about fifteen adult negroes on the plantation, none of whom could read or write. There were about twenty growing children, none of whom knew a letter. Roma had never given a thought to this state of things. The child's question aroused her conscience. Here was a field of work and of duty, indeed.

"Lady, why don't you answer me? If you won't let Ducky Darling come in here and learn along with me, tell me so, and I'll take my primer and go out in the garden and learn my lesson along with her, and teach it to her, too," said Owlet.

"My dear, you may bring Dorcas in, and we will begin with her. I really do not know whether I can teach her anything. She does not appear to be very intelligent."

Before Roma had quite finished her speech Owlet had darted out of the room. In a very few minutes she returned with the little black child, who waddled into the room very much in movement like her namesake, the duck.

"You are going to learn to read, Ducky Darling! To read about all the pretty birds and beasts and things in the picture books I showed you," said Owlet, as she helped the child to climb up on the chair, so

much too high for her that her little black legs stuck straight out from the front of it.

"It is an experiment," said Roma, as she took a card with only three capital letters on it—A B C—and put it in the hand of Dorcas, and told her the names of the signs, making her repeat them over and over again.

"Lady, don't you take so much trouble. I can teach her the three letters and learn my own lesson, too," said Owlet, drawing another chair close by the side of the one occupied by Ducky.

Roma took up her knitting, to which she had lately taken, as men take to cigars, or some women take to pipes, for the sedative effects, and she sat down in her easychair and knitted while she watched her pupils. Owlet was very zealous, and Ducky very docile, but the experiment was not a success—then, at least.

At the end of the two hours, which was the limit of the day's learning, it was found that Owlet had paid so much attention to her little companion that she had not got her own lesson, while Ducky had chewed up her A B C card, in spite of all her little monitor's vigilance.

For all the rest of the day Owlet made Ducky Darling her inseparable companion, with the exception of the hour when Hera came to carry off her child to her early dinner, only to discover later that Ducky Darling, immediately after her meal, had waddled back to the "big house" to join her friend, whom she never left until night, when she was again recaptured by her mother and carried off to supper and to bed.

The next day was Sunday, the first Sunday after Roma's return home.

The morning was glorious—a jubilee of heaven and earth; the world flooded with sunshine; woods, groves and gardens in full leaf and blossom; the grass starred with daisies; the air full of the fragrance of flowers and the songs of birds.

"We will go to church to-day," Roma said to her

little protégée, as they sat together at the breakfast table.

"To church? Oh, that will be good! I never was at church in all my life. Mamma used to go to early mass, sometimes, but she never took me," Owlet exclaimed.

"You shall go now."

"And may Ducky Darling go, too?" anxiously demanded Owlet. "I haven't seen the dear thing to-day. She wasn't in the garden with the chickens—she wasn't anywhere. But may she go to church with us?"

"Dorcas has gone to Wheatlands with her father and mother and all the children, to spend the day there, with some of their relations," replied Roma.

"Ah! That was the reason why I could not find her, the dear thing. Where is Wheatlands?" suddenly inquired Owlet.

"About three miles from this place.

"What is Wheatlands? Is it a city or a depot?"

"It is a large tobacco plantation owned by relations of mine, who are now in Europe."

"Oh!"

"And now, dear, you must get ready for church," said Roma, and she rang the hand bell, that soon brought Pompous Pirate to her presence.

"I wish you to put the white cob to the pony chaise, and have it at the door in half an hour. I shall drive myself and this child to church," said Miss Fronde.

"All right, ma'am," said the negro, with a deep inclination of his head as he left the room to obey the order.

Roma called Owlet to follow, and went upstairs to put on her bonnet and mantle. Independent Owlet buttoned on her own black cashmere jacket, but surmounted it by the inverted funnel hat, and considered herself dressed.

"You must wear the little black bonnet, my dear."

"But I hate the black bonnet, and I love my little hat that I have worn for years and years and years—the dear old thing!" Owlet expostulated.

"But, my love, you are wearing black for your dear mamma.

"Well, I don't see the sense of it. If poor, dear mamma had gone to the dark world I would wear black all the time, and never be happy no more. But darling, pretty mamma has gone to the bright world, and anybody who wears black for an angel in the bright world can't be possessed of common sense."

That settled the question. Whenever the Owlet promulgated her ultimatum she got her own way, and so, on this Sunday morning she wore her old double-funneled brow straw hat, looking more like a little devil in a pantomimic scene than ever before.

Often Roma felt that she failed in her duty by not rebuking this wayward imp, but there was such sterling truth and honesty in the child, such an inherent constancy to her own convictions of right and wrong, and, withal, such an innocent unconsciousness of giving offense, that Miss Fronde felt that it would be very difficult to set her right. She privately resolved to submit the problem to the judgment of Rev. Dr. Shaw.

When Roma and her protégée appeared at the front door they found the pony chaise, with the white cob harnessed to it, standing before the house. Pompous Pirate stood at the horse's head.

"Better leave me dribe yo' young mist'ess," said the man.

"Not this time, Pontius. Take Ceres to the meeting-house she is so fond of. Now lift Miss Catherine into the chaise," Roma said.

Pompous obeyed.

Then Roma got in, sat down, took the reins, and started the cob.

Owlet shivered and shook herself with delight as they went rolling along the avenue, between rows of sweet-scented flowering locust trees, and out of the broad lawn gate on to a road through the woods.

"Oh! this is dee-licious! I am so glad you didn't have Uncle Paunchus to drive!" she exclaimed, with a little shudder of joy.

"Don't you like Uncle Pontius?" inquired Roma.

"Oh, yes," Owlet admitted. "I like him well enough, but he is so awfully big. It sort of crowds one just to look at Uncle Paunchus. Besides, it is so nice and cozy for you and me to be driving through this heavenly place all by ourselves."

Their road wound up and down, over wooded hills and through fertile vales, with glimpses of farmhouses, fields and orchards here and there, until at last, on the outskirts of the village, they came to the church, in the midst of its large, well-shaded, parklike grounds, differing only from a park in the gleaming white gravestones scattered here and there among the trees.

Here were gathered many carriages, of every description, from the donkey cart to the family barouche, and horses which were unharnessed, and tethered, so that they might nibble the fresh, luxuriant grass while resting from their labors.

Roma drew up, alighted, lifted the child to the ground, and was about to take her horse from the shafts and tether him to a tree, when a voice sounded behind her.

"My dear young lady, I am so glad to see you—so surprised and delighted! Let me do that."

She turned and saw her own family physician standing there.

"Oh, Dr. Keech! So happy to meet you!" she exclaimed, giving him her hand, which he shook heartily, and retained in his grasp longer than necessary.

But the organ from within the church began to peal forth with the opening voluntary, and she added, by way of hastening the release of her hand:

"And thank you very much. You may, if you please, do this."

Doing "this" meant unharnessing and tethering the cob, which the doctor quickly effected, while Roma stood by, holding the hand of Owlet.

"And who is this young lady?" inquired the doctor, as the three turned to walk toward the church.

"She is Catherine Nouvellini, a little ward of mine.

You must come to the Hall and make her acquaint ance. She is quite worth cultivating, I assure you," Roma replied.

"I have no doubt of it," the smiling old doctor replied, patting the shoulder of the child. It was impossible to pat her head with such a church steeple of a hat as she elected to wear. "I have no doubt ot it. I shall do myself the honor of calling on Miss Nouvellini, or should I say the Signorita Nouvellini? or Mademoiselle Nouvellini?"

But they were entering the church, so the doctor got no reply to his "chaff," and fortunately did not hear the muttered criticism of Owlet as to his probable deficiency of common sense.

The church was not crowded, but on this fine morning it was full—every pew having its quota of occupants.

Roma led little Owlet up the right-hand aisle to her own pew, which was in the corner, to the right of the pulpit. She was scarcely seated when the rector came in from the vestry and took his place at the reading desk.

The services commenced and proceeded in the usual form of the ritual, and the sermon which followed was excellent in moral and religious instruction, "if people would only live up to it," as the good old lady remarked concerning the doctrine of total depravity.

As for Owlet, for the first half hour she was as quiet and solemn as her namesake's most ancient surviving ancestor; the second half hour she grew restless and fidgety; during the third half hour she yawned without the least attempt at disguise, and exclaimed:

"Ah-h-h me!" startling the sexton, who was seated near her, and waking several old women who were decently dozing.

Roma gently shook her head at the delinquent, and by so doing made matters worse, for the imp excused herself by saying, in an audible voice:

"If I hadn't said 'Ah me!' I should 'a' busted."

Then she tried to conquer her restlessness and to

keep quiet, and, indeed, she became very quiet, for her good intentions were rewarded by a sound sleep that lasted until the benediction was pronounced, and the people began to leave their pews.

After all the congregation had left the church Roma still remained in her pew, to wait for the opportunity of speaking to her dear old friend and pastor, Dr. Shaw.

He had gone into the vestry to lay off his surplice.

As soon as he reappeared, in his black suit, Roma came out from her pew, leading little Owlet, and went into the chancel to speak to him.

He advanced with outstretched hands, took hers affectionately, and, shaking them gently, said:

"My dear child! I am so happy to see you. I had no idea that you had come back until I saw you in your pew to-day. When did you arrive?"

"Only on last Tuesday, dear doctor, and as glad to get back to you as you can be to see me," cordially replied Roma.

"Right! right! right! my child! But who is this little one?" inquired the rector, taking the hand of Owlet in his own and looking tenderly down into her face.

"Catherine Nouvellini is a young ward of mine. I hope you will come to see us soon, and hear all about her, and teach me how to do my duty by her."

"I will come, my child; be sure of that. You are going to remain among us now?"

"I think so."

"Not going abroad to join your friends?"

"I think not."

"I am glad to hear that. 'Dwell among your own people,' Roma."

"You will come to see me soon?"

"To-morrow, my dear."

"Then I will not detain you any longer, dear friend. You must be fatigued with this long service. Indeed, you should have an assistant."

"The parish can't afford it, my dear."

"But you are being worked to death!"

"Well, it is better to rub out in labor than rust out in laziness."

"But you needn't do either," put in Owlet. "No, nor you won't, neither, if you are possessed of common sense. 'There's reason in roasting eggs.'"

The rector looked astonished. Then, as he turned to look at Roma, and met her glance, his eyes twinkled and his mouth twitched with suppressed mirth; it would not be seemly to laugh out loud then and there.

"I am afraid she has a cavity where her bump of veneration ought to be, Dr. Shaw, but you will help me to train her properly. Come, Catherine, we must go," said Roma, anxious to get the child away before she should have another chance of expressing her opinion. "Good-by, dear Dr. Shaw. I shall expect you to dinner to-morrow."

"Thank you, Roma. I will be there. Now, I would not really let you hurry away if I did not know by instinct that many of our friends are waiting to speak to you outside. Good-by, my child. Good-by, my small monitress," said the rector, warmly shaking hands with Roma and then with Owlet.

As soon as the two found themselves outside the church door they were surrounded by a crowd of Roma's old friends and neighbors, who showered welcomes upon her, and questions about the Grays, and their life at Delfcome; and when these were satisfactorily received and answered, came inquiries concerning her little companion.

To all these last Roma gave the same answer that she had already given to the physician and to the rector.

At length she was free to return home, and very glad when she went to her pony chaise, attended by Dr. Keech, who harnessed her horse, lifted little Owlet into the chaise, assisted Roma to her seat, and gave her the reins.

Then he stood with old-time courtesy, hat lifted, until the young lady drove off.

Roma felt a strong disposition to give Owlet a lecture on good behavior, but refrained, partly from the

reluctance of the strong and powerful to hurt in any way the weak and dependent, and partly from despair of such a lecture doing the child any good.

So they would have driven home in silence but for the prattle of Owlet, who, refreshed by her long nap in the church, was wide awake, and keenly alive to the delights of the drive over the wooded hills and through the fertile vales that lay between Goeberlin and the Hall, on that fine spring day.

So at length they reached home in time for their early afternoon dinner.

After this Owlet went out, to wander through the garden, with no companion but her bull pup, George Thomas, leaving Roma to read alone until the child was called in to supper and to bed.

The next day the rector came, early in the forenoon.

As he rode up to the house on his easy-going old brown mare he saw Owlet walking on the lawn, with her shadow, Ducky Darling, waddling by her side.

They had just got through their morning lessons, which in the duckling's case had been quite as unsuccessful as those of the preceding Saturday—her notions of imbibing knowledge being to chew it up.

The minister dismounted, tied his horse to a post, and came up to the children.

"Well, Miss Catherine, how do you do?" he inquired, patting Owlet's cheek.

"Pretty well, I thank you, sir. How do you do yourself?" inquired Owlet, on her best behavior.

"Well, thank you."

"This," said Owlet, introducing the duckling, "is Ducky Darling. And, oh! isn't she just too sweet for anything?"

Dr. Shaw smiled benevolently, and patted the little curly head of the black child, who responded to the caress with her lovely smile.

Roma had seen the arrival of her pastor, and came out to meet him.

They shook hands cordially and then went into the house.

Roma had intended on that day to tell her old friend

the story of the great fraud that had been passed upon her and the strange position in which she found herself in regard to her betrothed, Will Harcourt; but the subject was so painful, and so calculated to give pain, and the old rector was so happy in the return of the favorite of his flock, that she forbore to mar his enjoyment. Some other time would do as well, she thought, and so she put off the revelation to "a more fitting season."

The rector took an early dinner with her and her little ward, and went away early in the afternoon.

Roma sat on the vine-clad front porch of her house, knitting, and watching the play of the two children on the lawn, when, happening to look down the locust avenue, she saw a man approaching the house, whom, to her disgust, she recognized as Hanson.

CHAPTER XIV

SIEGE AND DEFENSE

Calling all self-controlling powers to her aid, Miss Fronde started up, ran down to the lawn, took the children each by a hand, hurried them into the house, and shut and locked the door, and without a word of explanation to the astonished little ones, who stood staring at her, she dropped into a chair, and thought rapidly, as strong-minded women do think in emergencies.

Where did Hanson come from? What had brought him here? During the five months she had stayed in Washington she had neither seen nor heard from him. He had given no sign of his existence to her nor to any of her friends. He had not responded to her suit for the setting aside of the fraudulent marriage ceremony, and since the decision of the court, which declared that ceremony null and void, and set her free, he had seemed as much lost to the world as if he had been dead.

But had he been keeping her in view all this time, while she remained in Washington, and had he only waited until she came home to her remote and secluded old country house, where he might suppose her to be unprotected, and at his mercy, that he had hunted her so quickly to her retreat? She was only five days from Washington, and he had found her.

The next moment she heard his step upon the porch and his knock at the door.

She started then.

He must not be allowed to come in, she decided at once, and to keep him out the door must be kept shut; for though he would not be rude unless he had been drinking wine, yet he was very suavely insolent, and quite capable, if refused admittance, of politely pushing past old Pompous and gracefully forcing himself into her presence.

This must be prevented.

The knocking was repeated with emphasis.

Roma went and withdrew the key from the lock and put it into her pocket.

Old Pompous now came strutting through the back door, and along the hall, to "make the entrance free."

The knocking was reiterated with impatience.

"Loramity! Dey can't wait a minute, whoeber dey is, an' I comin' as fas' as I can."

"Pontius! Stop!" said Miss Fronde.

"Yas, youn' mist'ess. Des lemmy open de do' fuss. Dey's comp'ny out dere," said the man, hurrying on.

"Do nothing of the sort! Stop! I command you! Follow me into the parlor, and listen to what I have to say. Come, children," said Miss Fronde; and pushing the little ones gently before her, she entered the sitting-room, closely attended by the huge negro.

The knocking grew loud and peremptory.

Pompous started impulsively to open the door, but recollecting his mistress' prohibition, he hesitated.

"Never mind the noise. Listen to me," said Miss Fronde severely. "The person who is knocking out there is Mr. William Hanson, who came here one sum-

mer with his stepsister, Miss Rebecca Bushe. You remember him?"

"Lor', yes, youn' mist'ess. I 'members ob him good —a werry nice-spoken gemman, an' werry libbal, too. Gimmy fibe dollars w'en he went 'way," exclaimed Pompous, making another start to answer the knocking, which was repeated at intervals.

'Stay where you are and attend to me."

Pompous stopped and stared.

"That man is not to be admitted on any account. Do you hear?"

"A—a—a—we-dem not to leabe him come inter de house?" doubtfully inquired the stout negro, with eyes and mouth wide open with astonishment that any visitor should be denied admittance within the hospitable doors of Goblin Hall, and especially that an old friend should be turned ignominiously away.

The knocking was resumed, much more loudly than before. Pompous looked distressed.

"Lemme do somefin' or yudder, youn' mist'ess. 'Deed an' 'deed it do makes me nerbous to year all dat knockin' at de do', an' me stan'in' yere doin' nuffin w'en I's so used to open de do'," said the elephant, trembling.

"I will tell you what to do, and first, why you are to do it. The man has disgraced himself. He is not fit for the company of decent people. He should be in the penitentiary."

"De Lor'!" ejaculated Pompous.

"Therefore, do not open the front door, for the villain is quite capable of pushing past you and forcing himself into my presence."

"Youn' mist'ess," said Pompous, slowly drawing himself up, "ef yo' 'nounce de word as he is not to be 'mitted inter dis house, he better not try dat yacket on me. Ef he do, he'll jes' fink a ton o' bricks has fell on him, he will."

"Very likely; but I wish to avoid a scene. Go, therefore, out of the back kitchen door, around the house, and meet him on the outside."

"Yes, youn' mist'ess; an' wot mus' I tell him?"

"Nothing from me. Just order him to leave the premises."

"But ef he ax arter yo'?"

"Refuse to answer any questions."

"Ef he gimme his keerd?"

"Refuse to take it. Tell him to go."

"But s'pose he 'clines to go, ef he is sich a gran' willyun?"

"Unchain Tiger."

"Oh, Loramity, youn' mist'ess! Tige would kill he!"

"Keep the chain firmly in your hand. I do not wish to have the wretch torn to pieces."

"Oh! I mus' on'y t'reaten 'im, to sca' 'im, like? But den ef he ain't sca' one bit, an' 'fuse fo' to go?"

"Then loose the dog on him."

"Loramity, youn' mist'ess! Dat dog yeat her dinner offen him!"

"Then I hope it won't give her a fit of indigestion."

"Youn' mist'ess, 'taine no joke. 'Deed, Tige is a wusser sabbidge debbil now she's a-nussin' ob her pups, dan ebber she was 'fo'. She'll mucilage dat po' sinner!"

"The man takes his life in his own hands when he trespasses on these premises. The dog is here to guard them. If Hanson does not go when he is told to go, he must take the consequences," said the young lady impatiently. "But there is not the slightest danger," she added; "the man has an excellent pair of heels, and will use them. He is a champion runner. Go, now, and send him away—peaceably, if you can, with the dog at his heels, if you must," Roma concluded, as she sank down in her easy-chair, watched by the two children, who stood, hand in hand, before her, awed into unusual stillness by the strange excitement of their "lady."

Roma took no notice of them. She was too deeply absorbed in her own profound indignation to do so.

Pompous strutted solemnly out of the room, and out of the back door of the kitchen, which he carefully closed behind him. He was in great trouble. The agonizing question with him was this—if he should

have to loose that beast on that man, and she should kill him, should he, Pompous Pirate, be hanged for it? He feared he should. He had only obeyed his mistress' orders, but the law was very "onsartin," he reflected, gloomily shaking his head. This brought him around to the front of the house.

Hanson was standing on the porch, looking about him while waiting for his knock to be answered.

The two men recognized each other instantly, simultaneously.

"Oh! you are there, are you?" exclaimed Hanson. "I have been knocking here for the last ten minutes. It began to look as if there was nobody at home. How do you do, Pontius?" and Hanson held out his hand in a friendly manner.

Pompous took it as a matter of policy, but was immediately instigated by the evil one to tell a falsehood. He never felt the least conscientious scruple about lying, especially in the cause of "peace and quietness," when he deemed mendacity a merit. Now he thought if he could persuade this unwelcome visitor that Miss Fronde was neither in the house nor in the neighborhood he would leave both without giving any trouble. So he answered:

"So dere aine nobody at home, sah. De famberly all gone 'way, an' de house shet up."

"Oh, I know the Grays and Eldes are in Europe, but your mistress—where is she?"

Pompous drew himself up portentiously and rubbed his forehead. He was not ready with the details of his falsehood. He was huge and slow.

"Why don't you answer me?" impatiently demanded Hanson. "Where is your mistress?"

"Yes, sah. To be sho. Dat's so, sah. De youn' mist'ess, sah. Yas, sah. De youn' mist'ess hab gone to Wash'town, sah. Yas, sah," Pompous finally replied, with a grin of satisfaction.

He had got his story all right now.

"Your mistress gone to Washington?" demanded Hanson with a slight smile.

"Yas—yas, sah, to Washin'town city, sah. Yas, sah. It's de sollum trufe, fo' a fac'."

"Oh, Pontius!" exclaimed Hanson, with a laugh. "Where do you expect to go to when you die, if you tell such stories?"

"Stories, sah!" exclaimed the negro, drawing himself up and pushing himself out. "I 'clar' 'fo' de Lor'——"

"Now don't ruin your soul by swearing to a falsehood. You know it is a story, and I know it is a story. As I came up the avenue toward the house I saw your mistress standing on the front porch, with two children on the lawn below. When she saw me she ran down, took the children, led them into the house, and locked the door after her, just as I reached the steps."

Pompous rubbed his head in sore perplexity.

"Yo' say yo' seed de youn' mist'ess on de poach, sah?"

"Yes, I did."

"Mus' be 'staken, sah. Mus' 'a' been Sister Sarious you seed dere."

"What! The colored housemaid?" demanded Hanson, half amused, half indignant at the impudence of the negro.

"Yas, sah. Dat's so, sah. Yo's puffeckly yight, sah. It were Sarious as yo' seed dere wid dem chilluns, jes' as yo' say, sah."

"Why, you dreadful old humbug!" exclaimed Hanson with a laugh, "I said nothing of the sort. I said it was your mistress whom I saw on the porch. Do you hope to persuade me that I mistook a negro woman, as black as the ace of spades, for the fair lady of the house? The devil fly away with you and your impudence. It was your mistress whom I saw plainly on the porch when I was close to the house. Now, what do you mean by telling me that she has gone to Washington?" he demanded.

Pompous rubbed his forehead in dire perplexity. Then, with characteristic facility, he immediately

"tacked," and, putting his hands together with persuasive earnestness, he said:

"Yes, sah. Dat's berry true, sah. But I finks as yo' didn' pay 'tention to w'at I were sayin', sah. No, sah, I sho yo' didn' year wot I were sayin'."

"Well, what in the deuce were you saying?" demanded Hanson, provoked and impatient, yet amused.

"I was a-sayin', sah, as de youn' mist'ess hab been to Washin'town, sah. Yas, sah, been, sah, not gone, but been, sah. Yas, sah; been to de city dis long time pas'."

"And has just got home?" quickly added Hanson.

Pompous cocked up his head sideways, like some huge bird, and answered, dubiously, in a noncommittal manner:

"Ef yo' say so, sah, it aine no manners to conterdick yo'."

"Then, since the lady is at home, go around and let me in, and take my card to her," said Hanson, producing a little slip of pasteboard from his breast pocket.

"I darsen't do it, sah. I darsen't, 'deed. W'ich my o'ders is strict, sah."

"Your orders?"

"Yas, sah. To 'quest yo' to 'part peaceable, sah. Yas, sah."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hanson, flushing red to his forehead. "Are these your mistress' orders?"

"W'ich dey is, sah."

"Did she send me any message?"

"W'ich she did not, sah," replied Pompous with dignity, "but des to sen' yo' 'way. Sich is my o'ders, sah."

"Ah! But suppose I decline to go?"

"No ge'man, sah, as is a ge'man, would 'cline to leabe a lady's house w'en he is onwelcome an' 'quested so fo' to do."

"But if I have the right to stay and demand admittance?"

"Dat yo' can't hab, sah. An' ef so be yo' 'fuses to

leabe de place quiet an' 'spec'ful, my o'ders is werry sewere. Yes, sah, dey is."

"And what may they be, pray?"

"To loose Tige on yo', sah," solemnly replied the negro.

"Tige? Who's Tige?"

"Her aine a 'who'; her is a what."

"What is Tige, then?" demanded Hanson with a laugh.

"Her is a doag, an' de werry fiershisht an' wishusest beas' as ebber yo' see, sah. A pu' mung'el her is."

"A pure mongrel?"

"Yas, sah; a werry pu' mung'el."

"I do not think I ever heard of that peculiar breed of dogs."

"Likely not, sah. Dey is werry yare; werry yare, indeed. An' dis Tige is one ob de yarest. Yas, sah, her is. Her's got mastiff an' bulldog an' Wushun bloodhoun' an'—an'—an'—less see, now,—some yudder sort ob sabbage b'ute wishuser nor all de res'. Yas, sah, I sho yo'. An' all dat go to make Tige de mos' tore down debbil as ebber libbed. She wouldn' min' killin' a man mo'n she would killin' ob a yat."

"And you have orders to loose dat brute on me?"

"W'ich I has, sah."

"What a savage that sweet love of mine is!" muttered Hanson to himself. Then aloud he said: "I have the right to enter this house. Go around and open the door for me."

"Couldn' do it, sah. No, not at no yate in dis yere worl'," repeated Pompous, solemnly shaking his head.

"I tell you, you idiot, that I have the right to enter this house and insist upon an interview with its mistress. Yes, and the right to remain here as its master. The lady is my wife. You are my servant. Go, and obey my commands, or neglect them at your peril!" Hanson changed his tone from light jesting to grave authority.

But the huge Pompous, though deeply impressed by his words and manner, was not influenced in the direction Hanson wished. On the contrary, Pompous

drew himself up and pushed himself out with solemn dignity, and answered with contemptuous indignation:

"Yo-o-o? Now, sah, yo' is offen yo' head."

"Go, and open the door for me!" exclaimed Hanson, losing temper and self-control at the same moment.

"Now yo's offen yo' head fo' sho; 'f'aid yo's been jinkin' too f'ee, sah. Now, I 'wises ob yo' to 'part peaceable, 'fo' I hab to onchain dat dere wil' beas' wot aine got no 'spec' fo' nobody, an' 'ould chaw a ge'man soon as she would a beef bone, an' 'joy one as much as tudder."

"To the devil with you and your dog. Go open this door, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Couldn' do it at no price wotsomever. Now, take my 'wice, sah, an' go w'ere yo' got yo' likker, an' sleep it off."

"You impudent fool! What do you mean?" angrily demanded Hanson.

"Now, sah, yo's c'azy junk! Dere's no use mincin' ob de matter; yo's mad junk. De wil' way yo' hab been talkin' 'bout de youn' mist'ess bein' ob yo' husban'—leastways, I mean yo' bein' ob her wife, proobes it. No, sah, take good 'wice, an' go w'ere yo' got de likker, an' s'eep off de 'fec's ob it."

"You confounded donkey! Understand that I shall stay here until I shall be admitted into the house I have the right to enter as its master and yours," said Hanson angrily.

"He's awful junk," muttered Pompous to himself, "junker dan I fus' f'ought. I'll hab to gib him one good scare 'long o' Tige!"

Then aloud he said:

"Oh! Yo'll stay here tell yo' get 'mitted into de house, will yo', sah? Den I shall hab to loose de doag, 'cordin' to o'ders."

"Loose all the blooodhounds on the place, you insolent villain! I shall not stir from this spot!" savagely exclaimed Hanson.

"All yight, sah. Ef yo' wants 'em. Des as yo' say. Dough I do fink as Tige will be much as yo' can stan',"

said Pompous loftily as he strutted off to the kennels muttering to himself:

"I'll des gib him one good scare, anyway. Dough I doane mean to loose Tige on him, sho 'nuff, Lor', no. I doane want to kill dat po' intoxified creetur, nor likewise be hung fo' de likes ob he. No, 'deed. But I'll gib him one good scare," he concluded as he reached the kennels and unchained the brute and brought her around to the front of the house.

She was a terrible-looking creature, a huge black beast, with a bull head, fiery eyes, heavy jaws, strong fangs, great shoulders, thick limbs and sharp claws. She glared at the stranger with burning eyes and showed all her teeth with a deep, thunderous growl.

Pompous held her chain with all his strength, and it took all his strength to do it.

Hanson was no coward, and he gazed at the monster with the interest aroused by a strange specimen of cross breeds in fierce canines. Nor did he for one moment believe that the negro would dare to loose the brute, that would be sure to fly at the stranger's throat, throttle him down, and finish him. He smiled in derision of the man who held the dog.

The beast crouched, sprang, and nearly pulled the heavy negro down.

"Now, sah," said Pompous, "will you leabe here like a ge'man, or will I let de doag loose?"

"Will you open the door for me?" inquired Hanson coolly.

"No, sah; couldn't, not at no yate."

"Then I will stay here until you do."

"Den I'll hab to let Tige loose, sah, an' her wouldn' min' killin' yo' mo' 'an ef yo' was a yat."

The brute growled like subterranean thunder.

"You insolent idiot! Do you dare to suppose I am afraid of your dog! Let her loose!" scornfully exclaimed Hanson.

The monster reared and plunged, and nearly pitched his keeper headforemost.

"Now, de Lor' 'a' messy on my po' soul! Wot shall I do? My orders was to let her loose on to yo', sah,

ef so be yo' didn' go peaceable w'en yo' was tol' so to do," said Pompous, in an agony of doubt.

"Well, you zany, why don't you obey your orders?" demanded Hanson with a scornful laugh at the negro's distress.

There are limits to human endurance of insult.

That laugh settled the question; the aggravating irony of Hanson's expression sealed it.

Pompous drew himself up and swelled himself out with solemn dignity as he inquired, in a tone of gloomy reproach:

"An' do yo' s'pose, sah, as I'm gwine to be hung fo' de likes ob a 'toxified sinner like yo' is?"

Hanson laughed.

"No, sah, I hol's de doag offen yo', sah; I spares yo' libe, sah; I gibs yo' time fo' 'pentance, sah; an' I hopes yo'll make good use ob de time I gibs yo', sah; it's de trufe, fo' a sollum fac'; an' so I takes my doag, an' leabes yo', sah—leabes yo' to yo' own 'wices, sah." And Pompous strutted solemnly away.

"Hold on!" Hanson called after him.

Pompous turned around.

"Who were those children I saw with your mistress?"

"De yittle brack gal were Hera Hutter's chile."

"Never mind her. The little white one?"

"De yittle w'ite gal were a pet orphin, wot de youn' mist'ess 'dopted to fetch up; yes, sah."

"Your mistress is very fond of that child?"

"She is, sah," Pompous replied with curt dignity.

"That will do. Give my respects to your mistress, and tell her that she shall hear from me again, and in another way."

"Couldn' do dat, neider, sah, no mo' 'an I could take in yo' keerd. My o'ders is to fetch no messidge."

"No matter. She shall hear from me all the sooner, and all the more to the purpose," muttered Hanson as he turned away from the house, walked down the avenue, and got into the railway hack that was waiting for him on the outside of the gate.

Pompous led his dog back to the kennels, saying to her in an apologetic tone:

"I knows yo's disapp'inted, po' doag. I knows yo' wanted to chaw dat willian. But I darsen' lef' yo', Tige. De law is so onsartin. Ef I had lef' yo' chaw him it might 'a' hung me."

He put the beast in with her pups and turned and walked leisurely toward the house. Pompous seldom compromised his dignity by hurrying; perhaps he could not, on account of his immense weight.

"Now I gwine tell my youn' mist'ess how I sca' dat 'truder 'way," he said to himself as he entered the presence of the lady, and bowed.

"Well?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"He done gone, miss."

"Very well."

"I done sca' him 'way."

"Quite right. That will do. You may go."

"He—he lef' a messidge fo' yo', miss."

"You need not deliver it."

"Yes, miss, but——"

"You must not deliver it. I will hear no message from that person; and if he ever should dare to present himself here again you are to treat him just as you have to-day."

"Yes, miss, sartinly, des as yo' say. Doag an all?"

"Yes."

"Any mo' o'ders, miss?"

"None. You may go."

Pompous bowed stiffly and went out, somewhat disappointed at not having had an opportunity to tell his bragging story in detail.

"And now what is it all about?" inquired Owlet as soon as the man had left the room.

"Only, dear, that a very disagreeable person, whom I did not wish to see, tried to push himself into the house," Roma replied.

"Then if the person wanted to come where he was not welcome, he was not possessed of common sense! And, oh, dear me! How many people are not possessed of common sense! And they make most of the

trouble in this world, too, that they do!" said Owlet in a tone of despair.

Ducky Darling came up to her, put her arm around her neck, and kissed her, in silent sympathy with a complaint she could not understand.

CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER SHOCK

Roma sank into deep and troubled thought. The appearance of Hanson in her neighborhood was annoying and embarrassing in the extreme. He had not the shadow of a shade of any sort of claim on her, she knew, yet he would pretend to one, and make himself very troublesome, now that her relatives had left her, and she was alone.

What should she do?

A very little reflection convinced her that her best and wisest course, indeed her only course, was to confide in her venerable pastor.

This she determined to do without delay, as there was no time to be lost.

She rang her hand bell, and brought Pompous once more to her presence.

"Go," she said, "and tell Puck to saddle a horse, and come around here to take a letter from me to Dr. Shaw."

Pompous bowed, and strutted off to do his errand.

Roma sat down to her writing-desk and wrote a note to her old friend and pastor, asking him to come out and see her on the following morning, if convenient, as she was in imminent need of his counsel on a very pressing matter.

When her messenger presented himself she gave him the note, and told him to take it to the rectory and wait for an answer.

When the boy had gone Roma sent the children out to play, and took up her knitting and seated herself

in her easy-chair to try to compose herself. But even her "contemplative" knitting-work failed of its usual sedative effect.

The day passed heavily.

Late in the afternoon her messenger returned, bringing a note from Dr. Shaw and a letter from the post office.

Roma opened the note before glancing at the letter.

It was but a line from the rector, saying that he had a marriage ceremony to perform in the parish church at ten o'clock, but would start for Goblin Hall immediately after its conclusion.

The letter was from Mr. Merritt, and also very short; merely saying that he wrote in great haste to catch the first mail, to warn her in time that Hanson had turned up that morning, and might get her address and give her trouble. "But if he should, my dear, just turn him over to the law and telegraph for me," added the old lawyer.

"This must have come in the mail on the same train that brought him, and reached Goeberlin about eleven. Truly, he lost no time between the train and my door," Roma said to herself.

It then occurred to her to send Puck back to Goeberlin with a telegram to Mr. Merritt, summoning him to her aid. But upon reflection she decided to wait until after she should have talked with Dr. Shaw. Early in the evening she sent the little black child home to its mother, and sent Owlet off to bed, and soon after laid her own head on her sleepless pillow.

Very early the next morning she arose, dressed, and went out to get a breath of the fine, fresh spring air.

She found Owlet, who always rose with the birds and the chickens, already up and dressed, and sitting on the steps of the porch, with her pup at her feet, and with her tiny workbasket beside her, filled with scraps of brilliant satin and velvet and spools of bright sewing silk, busy at work on the square of a crazy quilt. Owlet never dressed dolls, never played with or possessed one. She was a little crank on the

subject of shams of all sorts, and dolls she considered shams. She was also a utilitarian, "pure and simple." She loved to do all useful work. The crazy quilt took her fancy wonderfully. She highly approved of it, for she said:

"It uses up all the tiny little scrappy scraps that you could not do anything else with, and you don't have to waste the least mite in cutting, but make the scraps fit just as they are. Oh, it is the best thing ever thought of, and why they should call it a crazy quilt the Lord only knows, when it is the most sensible sort of a quilt."

So here she sat this morning, busy with her square, fitting "jags and tags and other bright fags" into a bewildering confusion of patchwork.

"How do you get on, Owlet?" inquired Roma.

"Oh, splendid! I have nearly used up all the scraps I have got."

"And what will you do when you get through?"

"Oh, then I mean to put my squares away until I can get more scraps, and take hold and help Hera to make her rag carpet," said the child, laying her brilliant wilderness down on her lap and smoothing it out.

"Rag carpet?" echoed Miss Fronde.

"Yes. I'll tell you all about it. You gather up all the old rags you can find, and wash them clean, and dry them dry, and then you cut 'em into strips and sew the strips together and wind 'em into big balls, and when you have got enough you put it in a loom and weave it into a carpet."

"Oh!"

"Yes. It isn't such a pretty work as the sensible quilt, but is so saving and so useful. I can't weave, but I certainly can cut strips and sew 'em together, and wind 'em up into balls."

"Ducky is nearly as old as you are. Do you try to teach her to sew?"

"No. It's no use. You can't do it. She can't learn. Ducky Darling is as sweet as sugar, but—I'm afraid—she is not possessed of common sense."

Roma was surprised into a laugh at the hesitation, the regret and the solemnity expressed in Owlet's words and looks.

"Here she comes now, poor little thing, playing on the musical box I gave her. That's all she can do, and that's only turning a little crank, you know," added Owlet.

Ducky Darling waddled up to them, radiant with life and joy, her eyes shining like great stars from the night of her dark face. She was playing on her toy music box with the greatest delight, though the instrument, being out of repair ever since it had been in her possession, could furnish no particular tune, but mixed up rollicking "Yankee Doodle" with dirge-like "Araby's Daughter" in the most eccentric manner. No less on that account was Ducky Darling delighted with her toy.

Roma sat down on the steps and took the little black child on her lap and began to talk to her, to draw her out.

But there was nothing in her to bring out but tenderness, love, devotion. She had no thoughts on any, even the simplest, subject.

The breakfast bell rang.

"Have you had your breakfast, Dorcas?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"'Es," said the child, still turning her music box.

"What did you have for breakfast?"

"B'ead an' m'ik an' 'lasses."

"A very good breakfast. Now you sit here and play your organ until we get ours," said Miss Fronde, lifting the child from her lap and seating her on the steps.

Owlet gathered up her work and rose, and the two went into the house and sat down to the table in the pleasant room, where four windows opened, two upon the old garden and two upon the woods, whence came in the fresh morning air, laden with the perfume of flowers and the songs of birds.

As soon as the meal was over Roma said to Owlet:

"We will go to our lessons at once, and get them

through before Dr. Shaw comes. I expect him about noon.

So little Ducky Darling was called in, and the three went into the sitting-room, where Miss Fronde seated herself in her favorite rocker, with her knitting in her hand, and the two children sat side by side on little chairs that had been hunted out of the lumber room in the attic and brought down for their use.

Owlet had a primary geography in her hand and Ducky Darling an A B C card between her fingers and her teeth, imbibing letters after her own fashion.

Quiet reigned in the little circle. Roma felt strangely tranquilized; Owlet was pleased with her study of continents and oceans; and Ducky Darling was delighted only to be allowed to sit beside the little playmate she loved so well, and who seemed to her like an angel of light and beauty.

An hour passed on without interruption, and then the sound of wheels was heard rolling toward the house.

"That must be Dr. Shaw," said Roma, as she left her chair to look from her window. "And yet it cannot be, for it is but ten o'clock, and at this hour he is in the church, engaged in performing that marriage ceremony of which he wrote.

Then a misgiving that the visitor might be Hanson come again, seized her. She was about to leave the room to lock the front door, when she saw the carriage stop, and—Lawyer Merritt get out of it.

With a cry of delight she ran to open the door for him in person.

"Oh, Mr. Merritt! I thank heaven you have come! Was it an inspiration? What brought you?" she exclaimed, seizing both his hands and dragging him into the drawing-room just as Pompous was strutting majestically up the hall to answer his knock.

She drew a big armchair and pushed him into it.

"There! Sit down! You must have traveled all night. You must be tired. You shall have a cup of coffee immediately. Pompous!" she cried.

"Stop, my dear," said Mr. Merritt as soon as he

could get a chance to speak. "I breakfasted at the Goeberlin House while waiting to get a carriage to bring me here. Had to wait two hours to find one disengaged. There was a wedding on hand, or something. However, I utilized the time by getting a bath and a breakfast, so now, my dear, I am quite comfortable, and entirely at your service. You got my letter?"

"Yes, dear friend, and I should have telegraphed for you last night but for 'sober second thought.' "

"If you had your telegram would have missed me. I was on my way here before you could have got my letter."

"Oh! what inspired you to come?"

"Intense solicitude on your account. After I had mailed my letter I heard, by the merest accident, that Hanson had started for this place. I determined to follow by the next train, and here I am. I found the fellow's name on the hotel register at Goeberlin. Of course he has been here?"

"Yes; but got no admittance."

"The insolence of the scoundrel! What do you propose to do, my child?"

"I sent a message yesterday to my old pastor, Dr. Shaw, to come and advise me. I expect him here between eleven and twelve o'clock."

"That is well, so far as it goes, but I am glad I came."

"Oh, I am very glad and very grateful!" fervently exclaimed Roma. "But how did this wretch turn up?"

"Heaven knows. Come back from a long cruise, perhaps. He appeared at my office on Monday morning, inquiring for you. He was so insolent that I threatened to throw him out of the window, and should have done so, too, if he had not left."

"Mr. Merritt, do you know that none of my friends here know the base fraud that was perpetrated against me by this man?"

"I suppose not, my dear. It was not a pleasant piece

of news for you to tell, and no one else could have told it."

"No. But now that Hanson has come to this neighborhood, and dares to come to this house and set up a claim to me, I feel that I must tell my old friend, Dr. Shaw, and get the benefit of his advice on the social side of the case."

"I think you are right, my dear."

"And now, Mr. Merritt, can I ask another favor?"

"Anything you like, Roma. I came down here to serve you."

"Then, when Dr. Shaw comes to-day, will you tell him the story of that felonious marriage, which has nearly wrecked my life?"

"I will do so, my dear. It is even much better that I should tell him than that you should," promptly replied the lawyer.

This decision had scarcely been reached when the sound of wheels was again heard on the avenue.

"That is Dr. Shaw now, I am sure!" exclaimed Roma, and again she anticipated the slow and solemn movements of Pompous by flying to the front door and opening it at the instant the old minister alighted from his carriage.

"I hope there is no trouble, my dear," said the kindly old man, after the first greetings had passed, and she was showing him into the drawing-room.

"Yes, dear friend, there is trouble. Sit down here in this large chair; put your feet on this hassock; give me your hat and gloves. There is our mutual friend, Mr. Merritt, of Washington. He will tell you all you should know," said Roma.

The clergyman and the attorney shook hands very cordially. They were old friends.

Roma left the room for a moment to put up the pastor's hat and gloves and to release the children from their lessons and send them out to play.

Then she returned to the drawing-room.

And then and there, in her presence, the story of her unequaled wrongs was told by the lawyer to her

old pastor, who listened with an amazed, horrified, scandalized expression.

"Why, this sinner is a subject for the State prison!"

"He deserves it," assented the lawyer.

"Oh, my poor Roma! My dear child!" sighed the old minister, taking her hand.

Roma winced. She hated to be pitied, even by her kind-hearted pastor.

"The only way in which the wretch can hurt me is by his false, unscrupulous tongue. He will tell every one who will listen to him that he married me, while I am known to be living here as a single woman. This will cause humiliating gossip. People always get facts distorted in cases like this, out of the routine of life. Questions will be asked and answered recklessly. There will have been something irregular, if not disreputable, in the matter. Was she married, or not married? will be asked. To which was she married? To whom ought she to have been married? Such questions, relative to a woman, right or wrong, just or unjust, reasonable or unreasonable, must always be damaging. Curiosity investigates without justice; thoughtlessness perverts, and malice distorts. I must be prepared to meet all this," concluded Roma, with a profound sigh.

"My dear child," said Dr. Shaw, "give me your authority to tell your whole story from beginning to end, without any concealments from your friends and neighbors, and believe me, Roma, it will meet with nothing but full confidence, sympathy and admiration. Come; shall I do this?"

"Use your own excellent judgment, dear Dr. Shaw, and accept my heartfelt thanks. Already you have inspired me with courage," said Roma, brightening.

Here Lawyer Merritt laughed.

"The idea of any one inspiring you with courage, my royal Amazon! You, who have displayed courage and heroism under trials that must have daunted the bravest," he said.

"Ah! but, dear friend, there is one sort of trial that

would crush me—to have the good name of my mother's daughter breathed upon by slander."

"That must never—can never be, Roma!" exclaimed the clergyman and the lawyer, in a breath.

At this moment they were interrupted by a strange incident.

Ducky Darling rushed into the room and flung herself face downward on the floor, with all her limbs sprawled out, howling:

"Oh, Owly! Owly! Owly!"

"Why, what is the matter, Dorcas?" inquired Miss Fronde, raising the child to her feet and looking at her.

The little black face was all screwed up with anguish and streaming with tears.

"What about Owlet? Where is she?" inquired the young lady, drawing the child nearer and gazing in her convulsed face.

"Dorne 'way! W'ite man!" sobbed the child, wildly weeping.

"White man? What white man? Stop crying, dear, and tell me all about it," said Roma, with increasing anxiety, while the minister and the attorney looked on with silent interest.

"Oh! w'ite man! Owly! Owly!" wildly wailed the child.

"Where did you leave Owlet? Tell me."

"Yoad!—ta'yidge! w'ite man! Owly! Owly!" heaved and gasped the child.

"Come and show me where you left her," said Miss Fronde, now seriously alarmed, as she took the hand of the child.

Dorcas, her little black face streaming with tears, her breast heaving with sobs, drew the lady, followed by the two gentlemen, toward the door, out of the house, along the locust avenue, and through the great gate leading to the road, which was bordered on the opposite side by a fine piece of woods.

"Deh! deh!" she wildly wailed, pointing to a nook under the trees, which was a favorite resort with the children.

There were the signs of the children's late presence and abrupt departure. There on the ground lay Ducky Darling's adored musical box, dropped and forgotten in her wild woe. There also lay Owlet's little work-basket, upset, with needle case, scissors, thimble, spools of silk and bright scraps scattered among the weeds and wild flowers.

On the road, just in front of the spot, were traces of carriage wheels which had stopped and turned there.

"Deh! deh!" still wildly wailed the child. "Deh!—w'ite man!—ta'yidge!—Owly!"

Roma began to understand, and a sickening fear seized her heart.

"Do you mean," she inquired, "that a white man carried Owlet away in a carriage?"

"'Es-s-s! Oh, 'es-s-s!"

"Which way did he go?"

"Deh-h-h-h!" howled the child, pointing up the road leading to the village.

Roma would not let the poor child see how much shocked, grieved and bewildered she really was.

She turned and looked in the faces of her two good friends and supporters.

CHAPTER XVI

WHO ABDUCTED OWLET?

"The child has been abducted," said Roma, turning very pale, and closing her lips very grimly.

Her two companions looked up in alarm.

"By whom, in the name of heaven, do you think??" inquired Parson Shaw.

"I am not certain," she replied.

"What shall you do?" asked Lawyer Merritt.

"Order a carriage, though it will be of little or no use, so far as the recovery of the child is concerned, if she has been carried off by the person whom I sus-

pect," Roma said, her lip beginning to quiver and her eyes to fill, despite all her firmness.

"Whom do you suspect, my dear?" inquired the parson, while the countenance of the lawyer expressed the question which he did not put in words.

"There is only one person open to suspicion," she said.

"That dandy devil, Hanson!" exclaimed Mr. Merritt.

"Hanson! Yes, there can be little doubt but that he has had me under espionage for a long time past, even while he himself was far away, and has learned, among other facts, my adoption of and affection for this child, and may hope to get a hold on me through my attachment to her. Yet, really, the plan seems so futile, the means so inadequate to the end proposed, as to be quite unworthy of the intelligence even of Hanson. So he may not, after all, have been the abductor."

"But if not Hanson, who then?" demanded Mr. Merritt.

"I don't know. But we are losing precious time. I will go and order the carriage. Will you kindly accompany me to the village, gentlemen?"

"Certainly." "Of course; with pleasure," responded the parson and the lawyer in a breath.

And the three turned toward the house—Miss Frond leading the weeping black infant, who seemed to have been converted into an inexhaustible fountain of tears.

"We will take the child with us. The drive may distract her grief," said Roma as they walked on.

On the lawn before the house they found Puck, who had just returned from the post office with a packet of letters and papers in his hand.

"Take them into the parlor, and leave them on the table. I have no time to look at them now," said Miss Fronde.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the negro. Then, noticing Ducky Darling: "W'y, wot de name ob sense is de matter 'long o' yo', Dorky?" he inquired of the wailing little one.

"W'ite man!—Owly!—ta'yidge!" wailed the child.

"Wot? Wot she mean, young mist'ess?" politely questioned the father.

"Owlet has been carried off in a carriage by some man."

"Oh, Lor'!"

"There is no time to talk about it now."

"An' she jus' doted on dat w'ite chile, Dorky did. Who could 'a' done it?" persisted the amazed negro.

"We are going to see. Hurry, now, and put the bays to the barouche, and bring it around to the door."

"Is me or Uncle Pompous to dribe?"

"You. Hasten!"

"Nebber heard ob sich a fing in all my born days! Man to steal a w'ite chile? Wot ebber any man want 'long ob a chile wot don't 'long to him passes me. Trouble 'nuff wid dem we has to 'vide fo'," muttered Puck to himself as he ran away to do his errands.

Miss Fronde passed into the house, went upstairs, put on her bonnet, mantle and gloves, covered Ducky Darling's little curly black head with one of Owlet's hats, and came down, leading the child, into the hall, where she found the two gentlemen ready, and waiting for her.

The carriage was at the door. They entered it, Mr. Merritt lifting the little darky to a seat beside her mistress, and were soon on their way.

An hour's rapid drive brought them to the village.

They drew up before the Goeberlin House, where Mr. Merritt got out to make inquiries concerning the suspected man, who, if he stopped any time in the little town, must have put up there, as it was the only hotel of any sort in the place.

He entered the office to interview the clerk, while Roma remained with her companions in the carriage, anxiously awaiting the result of the lawyer's investigation.

The little darky had cried herself into a state of collapse and quietness, with her head on Roma's lap.

In about fifteen minutes Merritt came out with a very grave face.

"Well?" anxiously exclaimed the young lady. "Well?"

The lawyer, standing at the carriage door, made this report:

"Hanson has been staying at the Goeberlin House for the past two days. This morning he hired a carriage from its stables, saying that he was going some miles in the country to bring a little ward who had been left to his guardianship, and take her with him to the North. He was gone about two hours, and returned to the house about an hour and a half ago, bringing the child with him. The child was not taken out of the carriage. She lay very still on the cushions, and seemed to be asleep. Mr. Hanson only stopped long enough to pay his bill and get his valise, and then was driven rapidly off to the railway depot to catch the 1:30 P.M. train for the East."

Such was the story told by the hotel clerk, and repeated by Mr. Merritt.

"To 'make assurance doubly sure,' let us drive at once to the depot and make inquiries there," said Miss Fronde.

The lawyer re-entered the carriage, took his seat, and gave the order.

The horses' heads were turned, and a few minutes' fast driving brought them to the depot.

As soon as the carriage was drawn up Mr. Merritt got out and went to the ticket window to ask questions, while his companions waited inside the vehicle in anxious suspense.

In a very few minutes the lawyer returned, and standing in his former position before the carriage door, made his second report, from the ticket clerk and the railway porter:

"A gentleman answering the description of Hanson had come in a close carriage just before the 1:30 P.M. train for Baltimore was due. He had taken tickets and engaged a compartment for himself and a little child, who seemed to be sick or sleeping, for he carried her very carefully and tenderly in his arms."

That was all the employes of the depot could tell.

"Now, you see, he must have chloroformed, or in some other manner drugged and stupefied that unfortunate child, in order to get off with her. He is certainly a most prominent candidate for an election, by a jury of his countrymen, to the penitentiary," said Mr. Merritt.

Roma was very pale and silent.

The old parson looked from the lawyer to the lady, but said nothing.

"Well, he has got off with the child. But we can telegraph—we can telegraph to the police at Baltimore to arrest him at the depot. And that will be likely to end his career in the State prison. How a man of his intelligence could so recklessly put himself in the power of the law is an act of madness I cannot understand. But I will telegraph at once," concluded the lawyer, turning from the carriage door to re-enter the depot.

"No," said Roma, speaking for the first time. "Do not telegraph. He has not put himself in the power of the law. I only wished to ascertain whether Hanson was the man who carried off the child. Now I have done so, I see that I cannot interfere. Let us go home."

"My dear Roma!" exclaimed the astonished lawyer, "is it possible that you do not know that this scoundrel has committed a felony in the abduction of your ward, for which you can send him to the State prison?"

"Oh, no; we could not convict him of any crime in this case."

"Why, what do you mean, my dear? Why, in the name of reason and justice, could we not convict him?"

"Because the child he has carried off is his own," calmly replied Miss Fronde.

"His?" demanded the dazed lawyer.

"His own child—the child of his deceased wife."

"My dear Roma!" exclaimed the lawyer in utter amazement, while the parson opened wide his eyes and stared in consternation.

"Get in the carriage, Mr. Merritt, and I will explain as we go along. But first tell the coachman to take us back to the Goeberlin House. I would like to question the man who drove this hack. I would like to know exactly how the abduction was effected," Miss Fronde said.

The lawyer gave the order and resumed his seat.

They reached the Goeberlin House, and sent a boy who was loitering on the sidewalk to fetch the hackman they wanted from the stables.

A young negro man answered the summons. He came up to the carriage door, bowed, and stood at attention.

Roma herself questioned him.

He answered that he had driven the "ge'man" down Goblin Hall road, but had stopped the carriage some distance from the great gate, at the "ge'man's" orders, where the "ge'man" got out, telling him to wait. The "ge'man" was gone about fifteen minutes, and then came up the road from the direction of the gate, bringing a child, who seemed to be asleep, in his arms, and that another child—a little black child—followed, running and screaming, until the carriage drove off and left her behind. He drove the "ge'man" to the hotel, where he got out to pay his bill and get his valise, and then he drove them to the depot, where they took the 1:30 train for Baltimore. That was all he knew.

Roma thanked the man and dismissed him.

"Now let us go home," she said.

The order was given, and the carriage started.

"And now you see she must have been chloroformed in the first instance," said Mr. Merritt.

"And you say she was his own child, Roma? How could that have been, my dear?" inquired Dr. Shaw.

"Yes, dear friends, Owlet is William Hanson's own child," Roma replied.

"Explain, my dear," said Mr. Merritt.

"That poor young woman, known to us as Madam Marguerite Nouvellini, who died in my arms in Washington a few days ago, was the abandoned wife of William Hanson, who had married her under a false

name when he was but a youth and she little more than a child. She never knew his real name. A few months after their marriage he left her in Paris, and went, under pretence of business, to California, from where he wrote piteous letters from a pretended bed of sickness—letters which grew shorter and more piteous—until at length they prepared her to receive a black-bordered and black-sealed letter from his invented physician announcing his death from the fever. To the hour of her death she never knew her decamped husband was still living."

"Roma, my dear child, are you quite sure of what you are telling us? For the story shows the man to be a greater sinner, if possible, than we have yet believed him," said Parson Shaw.

"Quite sure, my dear doctor. I have indubitable proof of the fact."

"Did you know all this when you first took the poor young woman under your protection?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"No, not then, but in a very few weeks afterward. She was a very simple, childlike creature. She put me in possession of her short life's story. She showed me the picture of her husband—Guilliaume Nouvellini she called him—who met her at a Parisian theater, and married her there. I recognized the picture as that of William Hanson. His sister, Rebecca Bushe, has the counterpart of it. She showed me also some of the letters and verses he had written to her, in which she took the greatest pride, poor soul! I recognized his peculiar, well-known handwriting. I was, therefore, absolutely certain that the dead Guilliaume Nouvellini, the husband for whom she had been mourning for nearly five years, and the living William Hanson, who had tried to marry me, were one and the same man."

"You did not tell her this?"

"Of course not. Of what use could the information have been to her, poor soul? Why should I have disturbed the last days of a dying wife by such a tale? No, she never knew it."

"Are you sure that there was a lawful marriage?" inquired Parson Shaw.

"She showed me the documentary proofs both of her marriage and of the birth and baptism of her child, which she carefully preserved, because, she said, she was the granddaughter and heiress of Mrs. Arbuthnot, of Arbuthnot, in the Highlands of Scotland, whom, however, she had never once seen, for the reason that the stern old lady, who was of ancient family, and of the Church of Scotland, and prejudiced both by birth and by creed against the stage, had discarded her only child, Marguerite's mother, for marrying an actor. Marguerite, however, cherished hopes that, now the old lady was nearly eighty, she might, before death, relent toward her descendants and seek them out."

"I should think it highly probable she would," said Lawyer Merritt.

"No professing Christian, as she is reported to be, dare go before the Divine Judge with malice in her heart," added Parson Shaw.

"Have you these documents, my dear?" inquired the lawyer.

"Certainly; very carefully put away," replied Roma.

"And, of course, you have written to the Scotch lady?" added Dr. Shaw.

"Yes, of course. Immediately after the death of that poor young creature I wrote to Mrs. Arbuthnot, giving her full particulars of her granddaughter and the condition in which her infant great-grandchild was left. I said nothing of William Hanson. There has not yet been time to receive an answer to my letter," concluded Roma.

"Do you think, my dear, that Hanson knows the child he has carried off to be his own daughter?" inquired Dr. Shaw.

"I have not a doubt of it. Else he would not have dared to take her. I suppose he has had me under espionage for a long time, and even during his long disappearance. I think, of course, that he knows the

parentage of my adopted pet as well as he knows my affection for her."

"Now, my dear Roma, are you quite sure that you have not been deceived in this matter? Even that your poor protégée was not herself deceived?" inquired Lawyer Merritt.

"Quite sure. I can show you documents and correspondence that will place the matter beyond question, even of a Washington lawyer. But here we are at home."

The carriage drew up before the entrance.

Puck got down from his box and opened the door.

The two gentlemen alighted.

Poor Ducky Darling had cried herself to sleep, sitting on the floor of the carriage, with her head on Roma's lap.

She lifted her very tenderly, and said:

"Here, Puck, take little Dorcas very carefully, so as not to wake her, and carry her to her mother. Never mind the horses for the present. You know they will stand until you return."

The man obeyed under protest.

"'Deed, young mist'ess, yo' sp'ils dis young 'un! 'Deed yo' does. 'Taine no good treatin' ob her jus' like she was a w'ite chile! 'Deed it ain't! 'Ca'se yo' see yo' can't keep it up, yo' know, w'en she gets ol'er," he said, as he carried off his little burden.

"The man is in the right, my dear," said Dr. Shaw as he gave his hand to Roma to help her from the carriage.

Miss Fronde threw off her bonnet, mantle and gloves in the hall, where the gentlemen also left their hats, for they were to stay and dine.

The three entered the sitting-room and found seats.

"Well, we have returned from a fruitless errand," said Mr. Merritt, with a sigh.

"Not quite, since we know for a certainty that it was the father who carried off the child; and surely no father, not even Hanson, could fail to be kind to his own and only child—the child of his youth and love, the motherless child of his young, deserted, dead

wife," said Miss Fronde, trying to console herself for the loss of her protégée, "and at least we have got rid of Hanson," she added.

"Only for the present, I fear. He is a very persistent wretch," said Merritt.

"Yes, he will come again, and that brings me to what I intended to say to you, my dear Roma, as soon as I knew that you had returned to live here alone, and before I had heard the sad story you told me this morning."

"Speak your mind, dear Dr. Shaw. I shall be grateful for your counsel. It was to seek it, you know, that I begged your presence here this morning," Roma replied.

"Then, my dear girl, this is what I wished to say to you—that since you declined to accompany your relatives abroad, and have decided to live here, in this remote manor house, you should not live alone."

"I do not. I have faithful servants and powerful dogs. I am perfectly safe here," said Miss Fronde.

"In person, yes, perhaps. But that is not the question, my dear. You will understand me when I say that you should have some elderly, respectable woman —some lady, in fact—to live with you as your chaperon and companion."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Fronde. "Should I? Is that necessary?"

"Absolutely necessary, in my opinion, Roma."

"Cannot a woman, nearly twenty-three years of age, who is intrusted with the management of a large estate and the expenditure of a princely revenue, be also trusted with the care of herself?"

"Not in the opinion of the world, my dear Roma. For the world rates—and rightly rates—a woman's fair reputation far above land or money," gravely replied the old minister.

Roma's fair face flushed crimson to the edges of her blond hair.

"But," she said, somewhat indignantly, "I think the world places a very low and evil estimate on woman when it presumes to infer that because she is neither

married, widowed nor aged, she cannot, therefore, be trusted to preserve her own good name and fair fame."

"Perhaps so, my child," temperately replied the old rector, "but we are not the autocrats of society; public opinion is, and it is generally right; so that in every instance in which it does not conflict with conscience we should submit to its laws."

"Very well, Dr. Shaw. I will advertise for an elderly lady as chaperon, though I do shrink from having the constant companionship of a perfect stranger," said Roma submissively.

"Well, child, it is a risk, I know; for even in the most respectable woman, most highly recommended, you may chance to find an uncongenial companion, or you may find a 'perfect treasure.' But you can always get rid of one who does not suit."

"Oh, no," said Roma, "that is just what I could never do. Once having taken a 'poor lady,' as such a person must be, into the house, I should not like to send her away."

"No," said Mr. Merritt, breaking into the tête-à-tête for the first time, "Roma would keep her for the term of her natural life, however disagreeable she might be—an incubus, an old man of the sea. So you must be very careful, my dear girl, in your selection of a chaperon—as careful as a man should be in the choosing of a wife."

A summons to dinner broke up the conference.

CHAPTER XVII

ROMA'S DECISION

Miss Fronde's guests left Goblin Hall very soon after dinner, the lawyer to go back to his chambers in Washington, the minister to return to his parsonage.

Both, in taking leave of her, had placed themselves entirely at her service, imploring her to notify them

by message or telegram whenever she might want them.

Roma thanked her old friends, and promised all they wished.

After their departure she sat quite alone in the small, dark-wainscoted parlor. The sun had gone down behind a bank of clouds.

It was now coming on to rain, and the air was cold for April.

Pompous came in and lighted the wax candles at each end of the mantelpiece and the moderator lamp on the round center-table.

Then, without orders, he brought in a basketful of resinous pine cones and kindled a bright fire on the hearth.

Roma scarcely noticed what he was doing until the sudden blaze in the fireplace made her look up.

"Take de chill offen de 'a', young mist'ess. Moughty onsartain dese Ap'il days an' nights—moughty. Yere dis mornin' so hot in de sun you'd 'a' sought it mought be July 'stead ob Ap'il; now so col' an' damp yo' mought sink it was Janiwery. Now I gwine fetch two or free cedar logs an' lay on top o' dese yere, an' it will keep yo' a sweet, lively little fire all de ebenin'," said the negro as he turned to leave the room.

"Thank you, Pontius," replied Roma, leaving her seat, in her restlessness, and beginning to walk up and down the floor.

In a few minutes the negro returned, laid the cedar logs across the andirons, clapped his hands gently over the hearth, to shake them free of fibers of bark, and then stood as if he had something to say.

Roma, pacing up and down the floor, scarcely noticed him.

At last he said:

"Mons'ous sorry to year wot happen'd ob, youn' mist'ess. Nebber yeared nuffin 't all 'bout it till I come f'om de mill dis arternoon. Mons'ous sorry I didn' set Tige on dat lowlife w'ite trash yes'day. Mons'ous sorry. Ef ebber he do sho' his lowlife w'ite face onto dis plantation ag'in I gwine set Tige on him, fo'

sho! I is, ef I's got to hang fo' it. I is, indeed. Trufe, fo' a fac'."

"I do not think he will come again," said Miss Fronde.

"He better not. 'Deed, he better not. Not ef he knows wot's good fo' his healf, he hadn't. But, say, young mist'ess, can't yo' have dat w'ite herrin' hung fo' stealing dat chile?"

"Hardly, Pontius."

"All yight, den. I'll be hung fo' him ef he ebber sho' his face yere ag'in. It's de trufe, fo' a fac'."

Miss Fronde made no comment. She scarcely heard the monologue of the man, who continued to talk in the same strain, repeating himself over and over again, as is the manner of his kind, until, receiving no encouragement to stand and talk, he strutted out of the room in his usual ponderous fashion.

Roma came and threw herself down in the easy-chair beside the table, on which stood the moderator lamp. By its light she saw the packet of letters and papers that had been brought from the Goeberlin post office by Puck in the afternoon, and, in the exciting events of the time, had been forgotten until this moment.

There were three letters—all of them foreign—one from Mrs. Gray, one from Abbot Elde, and one from Tim Toomie.

It is not necessary to go into this correspondence in detail, but only to glance at it.

Tim Toomie's letter—"the last shall be first"—was the only one with which he had ever honored Miss Fronde. He wrote to implore her to go over to Toomie's Farm and see his people and tell him all about them.

"For," he wrote, "they are not used to letter writing, and their letters are not satisfactory. They give me only the baldest outlines of news, as 'All are well here,' or 'Your granny has got a cold in her head,' or 'The red cow has got a calf,' or something like that, and I am hungry and thirsty for news from home, my dear Miss Fronde."

"I will take a day and go over to see the Toomies, and write the little fellow a long letter, with a full account of them," Roma said to herself.

Mrs. Gray's and Abbot Elde's letters still rang the changes on the delights of their foreign home and their desire to have Roma with them.

"Come over," wrote Mrs. Gray, "with Dr. Shaw. He has promised to make us a visit in August and September. Persuade him to anticipate the time and to escort you over in May."

"Why not?" said Roma to herself, as she folded up her aunt's letter. "Why not, indeed? I have nothing to keep me here now. The court has annulled the fraudulent marriage; Will Harcourt has been found, only to be more completely lost to me than ever; my poor little adopted child has been wrested from me by her own father, from whom I cannot recover her, except at a price for which I would not purchase my own soul, if it were about to be lost. Why not go to Scotland? But not before I settle up some business here. I will consult Dr. Shaw. I cannot ask him to come to me again so soon, but I shall see him at church on Sunday and make an appointment with him for next week. Yes, that is the best I can do," concluded Roma, as she arose and resumed her walk up and down the floor. She walked until she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of Ceres, who wanted to know if Miss Fronde would have a fire lighted in her bedroom, as the night was so cold and wet.

Roma declined the fire, but said that as it was late she would retire, which she immediately did.

The rain ceased to fall during the night, and the next morning the weather was fair and mild.

Immediately after breakfast Roma ordered her carriage, and drove over to Toomie's Farm to see the family there. She found them all well, and doing well. She did not tell them of their Tim's complaining letter to herself, lest it should give them pain, but she found out that she had no occasion to do so, as they had had a letter from him by the same mail which brought hers.

Roma accepted their invitation to spend the day, by doing which she knew that she would be able to write a longer and fuller account to the absent son.

She found—what, indeed, she had known before—that they were all very proud and fond of Tim.

Roma returned home by sunset, and after tea spent the evening in writing a very long letter to Mr. Toomie and two very short ones to Mrs. Gray and Abbot Elde.

When she had finished and sealed these epistles she rang the bell, and gave them to Puck, to be taken to the post office early in the morning. Then she went to bed.

During the remainder of the week her neighbors began to call on her, to welcome her back to her home.

They had all heard from Dr. Shaw of the terrible wrong that had been attempted against her in the felonious marriage, and tendered their hearty congratulations on her escape from danger.

"Our young men threaten to lynch him," said Dr. Keech, "and although at my age, and with my profession, which is to save life and not to destroy it, I would not assist at such a ceremony, neither would I utter a word or lift a finger to prevent it."

Roma was certainly comforted by the hearty sympathy of her neighbors, though she did wish that it had been silent and not clamorous.

At church, the next Sunday, she saw Dr. Shaw again and begged him to call on her as early in the week as he conveniently could do so, as she wished to consult him again. He promised to come on the next morning, adding that Monday was always his least busy day.

So, early on the next morning, the good minister made his appearance at Goblin Hall. It was one of the fine days of the fitful April weather—warm enough for June. Roma was seated on the front piazza, with Ducky Darling at her feet, playing on the broken musical box.

As the parson rode up, dismounted, and tied his

horse, Roma arose to meet him, shook hands with him cordially, and invited him into the house.

"No, my child, I will sit here, if you please. It is cooler. It is very pleasant out here," he said, sinking into one of the Quaker chairs, drawing his handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his forehead.

Roma took his broad-brimmed felt hat into the hall and hung it up. Ceres, who was dusting the dining-room, she told to make a pitcher of iced lemonade and bring it out.

When she returned to the piazza she called Puck from the flower bed he was weeding and told him to take the doctor's horse to the stable and attend to him there.

"Any fresh disturbance from that man, my child? For if there is, you know we will have to bind him over to keep the peace," said Dr. Shaw, as soon as Roma had taken her seat beside him.

"Oh, no, thank heaven! But I have received letters from my relatives in Delfcome, urging me to come to them. I think of going; that is all. No, it is not all, either, by the way."

"You think of going? How soon?"

"Just as soon as I get through some work I have set myself to do, by which time I hope you will be ready to take care of me on the voyage."

"I?—oh, my dear child!"

"They expect you for August and September."

"A dream! a dream, my dear! I canot leave my flock without a shepherd."

"And you shall not, dear Dr. Shaw. Hear me, dear pastor. I am the stewardess of more wealth than I know how to manage. I need your wisdom to direct and assist me in its distribution. For that reason I begged your company here this morning," Roma said.

"What is your idea, my child?"

"Well, my dear pastor, my second and well beloved father, I hope you will not be offended with your child, for, first of all, I wish to employ an assistant to relieve you of some of the arduous work of the parish," Roma said, almost timidly, for there were some occa-

sions—like this, for instance—when our regal Amazon was timid. She was fearful of seeming to patronize the venerable man who had all her reverence and affection.

He understood her.

Your thought is kind, my child, and I thank you. Have you any special person in view?" he inquired.

"No, no one whatever. I wish you to find some proper man, and employ him in your own name."

"I will think it over, my child. Yes, such an assistant would be a very great relief to me, at my age, though that circumstance, perhaps, ought not to be considered in the question."

"I do not see why it should not be. I think it is the first and most important circumstance to be considered in the question," Roma answered warmly.

"Oh, yes, my child. I know you think so, and that is just where your human affections and partialities come into the way to obscure your clear view of duty and responsibility. Now, let me ask you—is there not some other way, in fact, are there not many other ways, in which your means could be employed with better advantage to the poor and suffering of this world?"

"I do not know that there are. You are wearing yourself out in the work of this parish, and you should be relieved."

"But, my child, it is the duty of every servant of God to 'spend and be spent' in His service."

"Yes," said Roma thoughtfully, "and that your services may be the longer continued to your Lord and your people you must have an assistant."

"But, my child, there are more ways——"

"Well, and there are more means," said Roma. Then she broke forth, with sudden energy: "So much more means! Oh, Dr. Shaw, you don't know how responsible I feel for all the wealth I have inherited. I hardly can think it is mine—that I have any right to it."

"Yet it is all your own, by every moral and legal right."

"What have I ever done to earn it, to win it, or to deserve it? Nothing. My father left me, his only child, this plantation. But the negroes made it what it is, not I. And the negroes have a heavy claim on me. But how is the best way to meet that claim? I shall want your wisdom to direct me. Then—as if this was not enough for one woman—my Uncle Guyon died, widowed and childless, and left me the Isle of Storms. What had I ever done to earn or win that fine sanitary sea home? Nothing whatever; and I have no right to keep it all to myself. Once, indeed, I thought of it as a summer resort for my friends and myself only, but that was the inspiration of pride and selflove. My friends were of that favored class who can choose their own summer homes among the mountains, or by the seashore, or wherever they please. The Isle of Storms was not given me for my own selfish pleasure, but for the best uses to humanity to which it can be put—perhaps as a sanatorium for destitute invalids and children. And then, again, as if this Goeberlin plantation and the Isle of Storms were not already much too much for one woman, my Uncle Thomas dies unmarried, and leaves me the silver mine in Colorado. He discovered the mine, not I. It has proved a source of almost fabulous wealth. But what have I done to earn, to win, or to deserve all that? Nothing whatever. So I know that all this is not mine, for my own selfish pride, but that it is intrusted to me as a steward of the Lord."

"Tell me, dear child, how do you propose to discharge the duties of your stewardship? What are your ideas?"

"They are nebulous yet. I want your help to form them. I know there are things that I must do."

"And these?"

"First, get an assistant for you."

The aged rector bent his head.

"Secondly, build a school here for the free education of the colored people who have—they or their forefathers—tilled the soil for near two centuries."

"Yes! yes! yes!" assented the minister.

"Thirdly, convert the Isle of Storms into a free sanatorium for destitute invalids and children, and to devote some share of my California uncle's wealth to the necessary expenses. So far, all is clear; beyond this you will kindly direct me, Dr. Shaw."

"My child, if you set these good works going within the next year, you will have your hands as full as they can hold. Afterward we will talk of other enterprises."

"And you will aid me with your counsel?"

"Assuredly I shall endeavor to do so."

"And now, immediately, will you seek out an assistant for yourself? Your wide acquaintance with the young clergy of our church will afford you facilities for suiting your parish. After you shall have secured your co-laborer, and I shall have placed the material and financial part of the school and the sanatorium in the hands of Mr. Merritt, we will go to Europe, and make that promised visit to our friends in Delfcome. this you will kindly direct me, Dr. Shaw."

"It strikes me as Utopian, my child. At the age of seventy-five, after fifty years in the pulpit, to have my first long holiday, my first visit to Europe—a pleasure I never permitted myself to dream of. But I thank heaven, my dear, that the old man has still health and strength enough left for the voyage."

Soon after this the rector took leave, as he had to make a sick call seven miles on the other side of Goeberlin.

Miss Fronde went in the house and wrote a long letter to her lawyer, describing her plans, and asking him if he could become her agent in carrying them into execution—making contracts, engaging officers, and so forth.

The capricious days of April passed, and the delightful days of May came, but nothing was heard from Hanson or the child.

Then, one morning, Puck brought her a letter from the post office, bearing the postmark of New York, but having no proof of the writer, for it was imprinted

by a typewriter, both as to the superscription and contents.

Guessing whom it came from, and what it treated of, Miss Fronde anxiously opened it, and read:

"The child is breaking her heart, is ill, is dying, and will die unless she is restored to you. But you cannot have her, even to save her life, unless you take me also, for I also am in almost as bad a plight. I am desperate, for never man loved woman as I love you, nor ever did; or dared as much for her as I have done and dared, and will do and dare for you. Only give me an opportunity to plead my cause. Write and tell me when and where you will see me. Direct your letter to A B Y Z, General Post Office, New York."

Roma's first emotion on reading this letter was one of alarm and pity for the child; but these were soon swallowed up in burning indignation.

She studied the letter—analyzed it. How meanly cautious it was to avoid giving her any advantage over the writer! If he had stolen a child that was not his own he could not have been more guarded in his endeavor to profit by his theft without compromising his own safety from the law. He had written with a typewriter, he had given no address, signed no name, mentioned no name in the body of the letter.

"Why," she asked herself, "had the man been so cowardly cautious in communicating with her if he knew that the child he had carried off was his own?"

Then, for the first time, Roma felt a doubt as to whether he did know the child to be his own.

"Perhaps," she reflected, "he does not know, or even suspect the truth. Perhaps he thinks that he has put himself in the power of the law, and therefore, even when trying to blackmail me, he is cautious not to let me hold any positive proof of his identity or address, and so writes with a typewriter, and neither dates nor signs his letter, but requires an answer to be addressed to initials at the general post office. I shall not answer the letter at all, even to

refuse its terms. I will never suffer myself to be either persuaded or provoked into answering such impertinence. As to my darling little girl—yes, I could almost break my heart for her, but I will not, and neither will she—the wise little woman—break hers for me. Owlet is 'possessed of common sense,' to use her own quaint phrase. Besides, I do not believe one word about her being 'ill, dying, and sure to die unless restored to me.' Above all, more than all, she is a child in the safe hands of the Lord, and, living or dying, she cannot be lost out of them."

Roma took up the letter again, to tear it into fragments; but on second thought she determined to keep it, and show it to her two venerable friends and supporters—Parson Shaw and Lawyer Merritt.

About once a week the old minister came to see her.

The first time he came, after the receipt of the typewritten letter, Roma drew it from her pocket and put it in his hands.

She watched him until he had read it through and returned it to her, and then she asked:

"What do you think of it?"

"Oh, the fellow is a cowardly cur—Heaven forgive me for saying it! Think no more of the man or his dastardly letter. As for the child, you must leave her to the Lord. You can do nothing in the case that would not do harm. I have good news for you, Roma," said the rector, with a beaming smile.

"Ah! yes? Well?"

"I have secured an assistant—Paul Stone, a young graduate of the Theological College at Alexandria, who has just been ordained—a fervent young Christian, who is very happy in the prospect of going to hard work."

"I am very happy in the prospect of your getting some rest," replied Miss Fronde.

But there was a crisis at hand that must modify all their plans. It was a crisis that no one dreamed of.

CHAPTER XVIII

CATCHING A TARTAR

After Hanson had carried off Owlet in the manner so incoherently announced by Ducky Darling, and more intelligibly related by the hack driver and the railway officials; after he had got her quietly and safely bestowed in the snug compartment he had engaged in the Pullman car, and the train had started, he felt quite satisfied with his work. So far it seemed a complete success.

Owlet lay on the short sofa opposite to him, sleeping under the influence of the chloroform he had administered to her at the instant of first seizing her. She was very quiet, almost too quiet, he at length began to fear.

He did not wish to run any risks.

He stooped over her and looked into her face.

It was very placid; her eyes were closed, her lips slightly apart, her cheeks faintly flushed. She was breathing easily.

"She'll do," he said, and sank back into his seat. He drew a newspaper from his pocket, unfolded it, and began to read. He had read half way down the first sporting news column, and was deeply absorbed in his subject, when he was suddenly startled by a voice peremptorily demanding:

"Who are you?"

He actually sprang as he looked up from his paper to see Owlet sitting bolt upright on her sofa, regarding him with great solemn eyes, fearless and critical. He was really thrown off his mental balance for a moment. He had not expected to be brought to book by such a question from such a child. But then he did not know Owlet. He hesitated, and then, pursing up his lips, and opening his eyes very wide, he answered solemnly:

"I am the Great Mogul."

"I don't believe it," Owlet replied, without a change of countenance.

"I am also the Khan of Tartary," he continued, gathering his brows together.

"You are no such thing," said Owlet.

"Likewise the Tycoon of Japan," he concluded, in a deep voice.

"You are telling stories! And if you tell stories you will go down into the dark, dark world, where there is no sun and it is always night, and no moon nor stars, and no grass nor trees, nor even water. Oh! you better look out, and tell me the truth."

"Well, then, little monkey, I am your legal guardian, if you understand what that is."

Her look of grave reproof now changed to one of contempt.

"I don't believe you are possessed of common sense," she said.

"What!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "Why?"

"You cannot be, to tell me such a tale as that, and think I will believe you. Yes, and I know who you are, now I look at you good," she added.

"Who am I, then?"

"You are the man who came to the lady's house yesterday and made yourself a nuisance."

"A nuisance, did I?"

"Yes, a horrid one. Oh, I saw you before Lady did. I saw you coming up the walk to the house. When Lady saw you she took me and Ducky in the house."

"Oh! she did?"

"Yes, she did that; and she was in the right of it, too, I reckon."

"Why was she in the right of it?"

"Because she knowed you, and knowed you was not possessed of common sense."

"Ah!"

"Yes. And she knowed you'd do something bad, I reckon. Yes. And now I do remember all about it. I do."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes, I do that. You came up to where me and my Ducky Darling was sitting under the trees by the roadside, and I was piecing my sensible quilt, and she was playing on her music box, and you killed me."

"Killed you!" exclaimed the young man in amazement.

"Yes, you did. And you need not stretch out great big eyes at me, as if it wasn't true, neither, for you did. You did kill me stone dead, all in a minute, before I could holler. I did hear Ducky Darling holler, and then I went stone dead, and so near heaven that I did hear the angels playing on cymbals through my whole head. And then I knowed nothing till I come to life this minute, right here," Owlet said, quite simply.

"Now, don't you know that you are talking the beastliest nonsense that ever was heard? If anybody had killed you stone dead how could you come to life again? Tell me that," Hanson said.

"I know it sounds like nonsense," Owlet frankly admitted, "and if anybody had told me such a strange thing, and wanted me to believe it, why, you know, I should have told them they were not possessed of common sense. But for all that, I know it is the truth. And if anybody but you had called it nonsense I should not have blamed them; but you know it is the truth. You did kill me stone dead—dead! dead! dead!—dead as a doornail!"

"Well, then, how the devil did you contrive to come to life again?" laughed Hanson.

"It wasn't the devil, and I didn't contrive nothing; and I don't know, unless maybe I didn't get quite loose out of my body, for you know I only heard the angels playing on the cymbals. I did not go among them; and maybe the shaking of the train shook me down again into my body, and so I come to life. But I don't know. It makes my head ache to think," said the child, putting both hands up to her forehead.

"Then don't think. It won't pay," Hanson advised.

"I must," said Owlet. "There ain't nobody else here to think for me. And now, then," she exclaimed, with

sudden energy, dropping her hands and fixing him with her eyes, "what do you mean by it?"

"Mean by what, monkey?"

"By killing me and carrying me off?"

"I never hurt a hair of your head."

"I know you didn't hurt me, but you killed me as dead as Jubious Cedar."

"I didn't kill you."

"Well, never mind, I come to life again, anyhow. But what did you bring me here for?"

"I told you before. I am your legal guardian, and I have to take care of you," said Hanson, smiling on the child.

"Now you are going it! Ain't you afraid of the dark world?"

"Pooh! pooh!"

"You are not my guardian! Lady is my guardian, and you shall not take care of me; and the next place the cars stop at I mean to get out and go home to Lady. I know she is fretting after me now, and Ducky Darling is crying her eyes out, too. Oh, yes, I must get out at the very next place and go home."

"But suppose I cannot let you go?" inquired Hanson, partly amused and partly annoyed by the child's persistence.

"I'd just like to see you try to stop me," said Owlet, turning her head on one side and looking at him out of the corner of her eye in the most mocking manner.

"Why, what would you do?"

"I'd raise such a row they would think the train was on fire—I'd scream and scream and scream, until everybody would run to see what was the matter."

"And then what would you do?"

"I would tell them all about it, and I would beg somebody to take me home to Lady, and tell them how much Ducky Darling would love them."

"And who is Ducky Darling?"

"Oh, she is the sweetest thing you ever did see! My sweet, lovely, dear Ducky Darling!"

"Oh, the little black monkey that yelled so

when——" Hanson began, but stopped. He did not wish to admit too much to this uncanny child.

But Owlet took up the thread he dropped, and said:

"Yes, she was the one who screamed so when you killed me right before her eyes. I should think she might. I heard her just as I went dead and heard the cymbals."

Hanson said no more just then. He was thinking intently.

He knew that they were approaching a station, where the train would stop fifteen minutes for refreshments, and where this uncanny elf would certainly give him trouble unless he could circumvent her in some way.

"How far is the next place where the cars stop?" Owlet suddenly asked.

"About ten miles; but, my child, if we get off there we shall have to sit up all night at the station, for there is no train coming for Goeberlin that will stop there till to-morrow morning."

"Well, I would not mind sitting up all night to get back to Lady in the morning," said Owlet eagerly.

"Yes, but by going on a little further, and stopping at the second station, we can get a down train in a few minutes afterward, and get back to Goeberlin by nine o'clock, and to Lady by ten o'clock. Wouldn't that be better?"

"How far is the second place we stop at off from here?" cautiously inquired Owlet before committing herself.

"Oh, only about fifteen miles. We shall soon get there."

"And you'll take me out and take me back home by the next train that passes?"

"Yes, indeed."

"If you don't, you know, I'll raise a row, and then how will you feel?"

"How, indeed! But I assure you, on the honor of a gentleman, if, when we reach the second station you wish to get out, I will take you out."

"There! We are coming to the first place now!"

Owlet exclaimed as the steam whistle shrieked its warning.

"Yes, here we are," Hanson said as the train drew near the station.

"Oh, I wish we could get out here and get home!" Owlet said.

"But we could not get back from here to-night, as I told you. But a few miles off we can get out and take the down train."

"And will you—oh, will you take me back to my own Lady?"

"I have sworn it."

"Are you sorry you killed me and brought me here?"

"But I did not kill you, little one. I would not have hurt you for the whole world. Now look straight in my face and tell me if you don't believe me."

"W-e-l-l," drawled Owlet, hesitatingly, "I may believe you didn't intend to do it, but you did do it, all the same, and what you did it for the Lord only knows —I don't."

Here the train stopped, and people began to leave their seats.

"What are they going out for?" inquired Owlet.

"To get something to eat. Shall I go and fetch you some cake and some sweet wine?"

"Oh, yes, do! I am awful hungry! My stomach's gone to my backbone. I'm as hollow as—as anything."

Hanson went out and crossed to the refreshment room, and soon returned with a paper bag of cakes and a glass of sweet wine.

"Here," he said, "drink the wine first, because I must take the glass back to the room. You can eat your cake while I am getting something for myself."

"All right," said Owlet. "Don't let me keep you."

Hanson returned to the refreshment room, made as good a meal as he could under the circumstances, and came back to his seat just an instant before the train started.

Owlet had finished her lunch, and, being a tidy little

old party, she had gathered up the crumbs, put them in the paper bag, and thrown them out of the window.

"How do you feel?" inquired Hanson, looking at her attentively.

"So good," murmured Owlet, raising her heavy eyelids for an instant and then letting them fall over the great, somber eyes as she sank back in her corner with a sigh of profound satisfaction.

The next moment she was fast asleep.

The sun was low in the west, and as their compartment was at the back of the car the level rays struck in through the window and shone upon the child's head, seeming to kindle sparks in her golden-brown hair.

The train was rushing eastward with fearful speed, but the motion only seemed to deepen the sleeper's slumber.

Hanson lifted her from the corner and laid her on the sofa, arranged her comfortably, covered her, and tucked her in, and then drew down the blind to shade her face.

"She will give no more trouble to-night," he said as he sat back in his seat and lighted a cigar, for it was now too dark to read with the curtains drawn.

The sun set, and the porter came in to light the lamp. The flash failed to wake the sleeping child; yet, as a precaution, Hanson drew out his pocket handkerchief and spread it over her face.

Then he took his newspaper and resumed his reading.

The porter left the compartment.

The sleeper slept on, and on, and on, through every stoppage and every start of the train, until it reached Philadelphia and ran into the lighted station.

She was so still that Hanson grew uneasy again, feeling that he was playing a dangerous game with this child, that might affect his life as well as her own. He felt her pulse, but found it perfectly normal. He lifted and turned her over, with her face away from the light. She drew a deep sigh of relief, as if

refreshed by the change of position, and then sank into still deeper slumber.

Hanson left the train and went into the restaurant, where he made a very satisfactory, if rather late, dinner.

He took his seat in his compartment just as the train was about to start.

The child seemed sleeping well.

He lighted another cigar and smoked it out. Then he composed himself for a doze, while the train sped on from Philadelphia to New York.

It was half-past ten o'clock when the train ran into the depot at Jersey City.

Hanson lifted the sleeping child in his arms, arranged her dress, put on her hat, and laid her head over his shoulders, saying to himself:

"Now, I wonder what my yachting and sporting friends would think if they could see me here playing nursemaid to a young child."

He laughed at the conceit as he stepped off the train and passed along the platform, mingling with the crowd hurrying to the ferryboat. He hurried onto the boat and into the saloon, where he found a seat in the most shady part of a well-lighted place. He sat down, laid the child across his knees and looked with some uneasiness into her sleeping face, when, to his dismay, she opened her great, solemn, brown eyes and looked at him. But there was no "speculation" in her gaze, and, with a weary sigh, she closed her eyes again and relapsed into slumber.

When the crowd of passengers had all found seats and leisure to look about them, several people, mostly women, noticed the young man with the sleeping child on his knees, a rather unusual sight.

"Look at that young father with his child on his lap. See how tender he is of her, how careful not to wake her," said one woman to another.

"Yes; but where is the mother? There doesn't seem to be anybody with him," said her companion.

"Oh," replied the first speaker, lowering her voice, "don't you see, the poor young fellow is in black?"

"That's nothing. So many men wear black. It is so becoming, you know," said the second speaker.

"Yes; but the child is in black, too. Little girls don't wear black frocks unless they are in mourning."

"Oh, yes. I see. That's so. Poor things. I'm sorry for both."

Hanson overheard the whole conversation between the two women, their penetrating whispers rather more distinctly than their normal tones. And he smiled at their inferences. Yet he was not very easy in his mind, either. He was very much in dread of meeting some acquaintance, especially some young sporting man, who, recognizing him, and finding him in his present occupation, after so mysterious a disappearance and so long an absence, might embarrass him with questions or vex him with "chaff."

A little later that was just what happened.

The ferryboat touched the pier at the foot of Cortlandt Street, and some people came on board to meet friends who were arriving by it.

Hanson recognized a few of his acquaintances among them, but, fortunately, they all seemed too much engaged in searching out and welcoming friends whom they had come to meet, to take any notice of him.

Carrying the child in his arms, Hanson left the boat with the crowd and stood in the midst of another crowd—a vociferous crowd of hackmen and hotel drummers.

Holding the child in one arm, with her head on his shoulder, he beckoned one yelling Jehu, and the man jumped to obey.

"Bring up your carriage at once," said the young man, and the fortunate candidate for public patronage darted off with amazing alacrity to execute the commission, leaving his patron standing there, with the sleeping child in his arms.

The hackman had scarcely disappeared when Hanson was suddenly saluted with a startling clap on the shoulder and a——

"Hello! By Jove! Where did you come from? Dropped from the skies?"

"How are you, Larkins? I'm devilish glad to see you!" exclaimed Hanson, lying as coolly as he could, under the circumstances, and extricating his right hand to offer the newcomer, a tall, young fellow, with dark hair and mustache, light, gray eyes and pug nose —making up rather a good-humored, mocking countenance, and the last man on earth Hanson would have liked to meet. "Yes, I have dropped from the skies! In other words, just returned from an infernal voyage around the Horn."

"Around the Horn! What the deuce ever took you around the Horn?"

"The merchant ship *Argonaut*, a beastly old wash-trough; but it is too long a story to tell you now."

"And—hello!—what the deuce have you got there? I thought it was your duster thrown over your shoulder, but now I see it is something alive. What the mischief is it?"

"You may well ask. It is an orphan child, for whom and for whose estates I have the honor to be appointed guardian and trustee."

"Holy poker! You appointed guardian of a child! Why, I should as soon think of your being consecrated bishop of New York!"

"So should I," coolly responded Hanson.

"You'll bring the boy up a spendthrift."

"It is a girl."

"A girl! Whe—ew! Pray, are you ordained nursemaid to an infant girl?"

"None of your nonsense, Larkins. This responsibility was thrust upon me suddenly. I did not choose to retain the young girl who was the child's maid. She was too pretty and vivacious."

"For the interests of propriety; I see. I didn't know you were so very particular! But, then, I suppose, being left guardian to a child does 'solemnize' a man. But why didn't you find an old woman?"

"Hadn't time to look one up."

"What are you going to do with the imp?"

"'Imp' you may well call her," said Hanson, wincing at his own reminiscences.

"She was a deal of trouble on the journey, I dare say."

"Not in the sense I think you mean. But she utterly repudiates me as her guardian. Favored me with her opinions in very plain language. Threatened to 'kick up a row' if I didn't take her back to—to——"

"To whom?"

"To her handsome nursemaid. But she became very tired and soon went to sleep, and since that has given me no trouble at all."

"Charming child! But, as I remarked before, what are you going to do with her?"

"I should have taken her to my mother and sister; but the first news I heard on reaching my native shores was that they had left theirs."

"Yes; they sailed for Liverpool a few days ago, I am sorry to say, on my own account."

"How do you and Reba get on?"

Larkins shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

"And, by the way, how came you down here? Whom did you expect to meet?"

"Not you, certainly, old chap; though I am deuced glad to see you. I came to meet the *mater*, who was to have arrived by this train from Washington, only she didn't come—she never does. I'm used to it. I shall find a tel. when I get back to Sixty-second Street."

"Here's my carriage now. Good-by, Larkins. Call and see me at the Star to-morrow."

"Thank you. By-by."

The friends parted.

Hanson went to the carriage.

Larkins waved his hand and walked off.

The hackman jumped down from his box and opened the door for his fare.

Hanson entered, and laid the child down on the cushion on the front seat, and sank down into the back one with a sigh of relief. The child had become

a burden, and he had not been accustomed to heavy burdens. He was very tired.

"Where, sir?" inquired Jehu.

"First, take these checks and go to the baggage car and get my valise and hatbox; and don't be half so long about it as you were in bringing up the carriage," said Hanson.

"So many vehicles ahead of me, sir, couldn't get here any sooner," said the man, as he took the credentials and darted off as swift as Jove's Mercury.

He soon came back with the properties, which he piled up on his own seat, not to incommode the inside passengers.

Then he came around to the door and inquired:

"Where, sir?"

"To the Star."

Jehu closed the door, sprang to his seat, and started his horses.

Twenty minutes' rapid drive brought them to the "Star."

It was now about a quarter to twelve o'clock.

Leaving the child sleeping on the cushions, and telling the hackman to wait, Hanson went into the office and inquired if he could engage a large bedroom for himself, with a small one communicating with it for his little ward, a child between five and six years of age.

He could, on the third floor front, was the answer he received.

Having registered his name—William Hanson, of New York, and ward—he returned to the carriage, attended by two porters, one of whom took his valise and hatbox, and the other the sleeping child.

Hanson paid and discharged the hack, and then followed the porters into the house—first into the reception room, and then by the elevator to the third story, where he was shown into his small suite of two rooms.

One porter set the luggage down on the floor, and the other laid the sleeping child down on the bed.

Hanson "tipped" them both, and dismissed them.

Then he turned up the gas, and went to look at his poor little charge. A change had come over her. Her face was flushed, her skin was hot and dry, her lips parched, her pulse quick, and her breathing short.

"Poor little devil, I am afraid I have done for her!" said Hanson to himself, in some alarm, as he hastily and awkwardly unfastened the child's clothes and took off her upper garments, her hat, frock, shoes and stockings.

Then he lifted her in his arms, bore her into the next room and laid her in the cool, fresh bed.

"I wonder if they have put any ice water in the room?" he said, as he went in search of some.

Yes; he found a pitcher full, fished out a lump of ice, broke it into small pieces and put it in a glass. Then he took a towel, put it in the washbasin, poured ice water over it, squeezed it out, folded it, and with that and the pounded ice returned to the little room and to the child's bedside.

Then he bathed her face, laid the cold, wet towel on her hot and throbbing forehead, and put a thin flake of ice within her parched lips.

She sucked it mechanically and murmured in her sleep:

"Lady—Ducky Darling—chickies."

Hanson sat down beside her, gave her little chips of ice and renewed the wet towels on her head at intervals. Her skin seemed getting cooler, her breathing softer, but her pulse was still very quick.

"She is going to be ill, I fear. But she is certainly not in any imminent danger at present," he said, as he arose from his chair, lowered the gas and left the room.

He went downstairs to the supper room and ordered a small but epicurean repast. After he had partaken of this he passed into the reading room and looked over all the day's papers. Finally he lighted a cigar, and went out for a stroll on the sidewalk.

It was after one o'clock when he re-entered the house and went up to his rooms.

He found Owlet much worse than he had left her.

She was burning up with fever, moaning and turning in her sleep.

"This will never do. She is going to be very ill. I must have a physician in the morning. But what if he discovers that the child has been drugged? I shall have to tell him that she has been suffering from malarial fever, accompanied with severe pain in her limbs, and that I had to give her morphia on the train. But I must do what I can for the poor little wretch to-night. This is not opium poisoning, however. It is something else. The combined effect of all that has happened to her to-day. And it need not be fatal," Hanson concluded, as he took off his coat and sat down beside the child to watch her through the night and cool her scorching head with cold towels and her parched throat with flakes of ice.

No good woman could have been more tender in her ministrations than was this bad man, though their motives would have been different—the first serving from love or benevolence, the second from selfishness, though something of pity, compunction and apprehension entered into his motive.

He dozed in his armchair by the bedside of the child, but woke whenever she moaned or tossed, and moistened her lips with flakes of ice, or cooled her forehead by a fresh application of a wet towel.

So passed the night, until in the gray of the morning, overcome by fatigue, Hanson fell fast asleep in his chair.

CHAPTER XIX

OWLET'S ADVENTURES

It was late in the morning when Hanson awoke—awoke to find the child still worse than on the preceding night. Her whole face was scarlet, her eyes now flared open, wild and bloodshot, her lips parched, her pulse beating almost too fast to be counted.

Hanson was at last very much alarmed.

Without stopping to slip on his coat, he rang the bell violently, and soon brought a porter hurrying to his door to see what was the matter.

"My child is very ill. Ask at once the clerk in the office to send for the nearest physician."

And when the man had gone Hanson dressed himself in great haste and returned to the bedside of his stolen charge.

Dr. Paulet, whose office was on the ground floor front of the next house on the right, soon came—a fair, slight, refined-looking man of middle age.

Hanson met him anxiously and took him to the bedside of his ward.

The doctor made his examination and asked some questions.

Hanson answered them all in the way that he had planned to do, and furthermore gave the same account of his possession of the child that he had given to young Larkins.

The doctor made no comment on the story. He was very reticent. He said, however, that the child was extremely ill and her recovery doubtful, and that with Mr. Hanson's consent he would send a trained nurse to take care of her.

Hanson expressed himself as more than grateful for the suggestion.

Within an hour after the doctor's departure, a rosy-cheeked, cheerful-looking woman of about forty years of age, presented herself with a note from Dr. Paulet.

Not until the nurse was installed by the bedside of the patient did Hanson leave the room to go down and get his matutinal cup of coffee.

For the first time in his life, perhaps, he was beginning to feel that there were such things as remorse and fear.

For Owlet a dangerous illness followed. Fever and delirium ran high. She raved incessantly—of all her short, past life, of her pretty mamma, of the pantomime, of the ballet, of Santa Claus' Christmas procession, of "Lady," of "Ducky Darling," of the chick-

ens, the garden, the woods—and she warned divers persons—notably Hanson and the doctor—that they were not possessed of common sense; but she recognized no one, or mistook them for some one else, and, strangely enough, she never spoke of her abduction. The events immediately preceding her illness seemed to be effaced from her memory.

The doctor was very much interested in the child. He had heard from Hanson that she was an orphan heiress, who had been left to his guardianship; that he should have placed her in the care of his mother and sister, had not those ladies left the country, for a summer tour in Europe; that now, if the child should happily recover, he should engage a nurse and a governess for her—discreet, middle-aged women, and have her under his own immediate care until the return of his mother and sister from abroad.

The doctor warmly commended the prudence of the youthful guardian, and afterward spoke with enthusiasm of "that young Hanson" as one of the most excellent young men it had ever been his good fortune to meet.

It was about this time that Hanson wrote his cautious letter to Roma Fronde, telling her that the child was ill unto death, breaking her heart for her "Lady," and that she would certainly die unless she could be restored to her benefactress; but that she could only be carried home by him—Hanson—and only on condition that he—Hanson—should be received with her.

Hanson waited impatiently, from day to day, for an answer to this letter; but when five days had passed, and none had come, he wrote again, in stronger terms, but with no better success.

Then he became convinced that she never intended to notice his letters, no matter how often he might write.

And now he resolved to do, what he had never before this thought of doing, though Roma had suspected him of that very baseness. He resolved to send a private detective down to the neighborhood

of Goeberlin to watch Miss Fronde and find out all about her—her state, her habits, and her intentions, and report to him.

He was able and willing to spend a great deal of money on this venture.

He decided to send his man down in the character of a peddler, who, while traveling about the country offering his goods to families and their servants, should make observations and ask questions. He spared no expense in this evil enterprise. He purchased a large quantity of miscellaneous goods, and agreed to give them and all their profits to his agent; to pay his peddler's license, his traveling expenses, his hotel bills, and for the cart and horse the man would have to buy or hire.

For all this he only stipulated that the spy should keep him—Hanson—informed, by daily letters, of all Miss Fronde's daily life.

This enterprise was not, however, more successful than preceding ventures had been.

The first news that Hanson received from his spy was not encouraging to his hopes. Miss Fronde was not breaking her heart for the loss of her pet, or for any other cause. That fine young woman was perfectly well, and actively employed.

In partnership with her clergyman and her solicitor, she was drawing plans and making contracts for the building of a free school for colored people on her plantation, and also for a sanatorium for destitute children and invalids on her seaside estate, the Isle of Storms.

"Squandering her fortune in that mad manner!" exclaimed Hanson, in disgust, forgetting that he himself squandered ten times as much in yachting, racing, gambling and more objectionable pursuits. "So much for trusting women with wealth. She ought to have a trustee appointed by the courts to take care of her estates. If I were her next of kin, I know what I would do. I would soon stop her mad career."

The next news he heard from his spy was to the

effect that Miss Fronde was going to Europe in August.

"She is, is she? Then I will go on the same ship and take the child with me," said Hanson to himself; and he wrote back to his man to remain in the neighborhood until Miss Fronde should leave it for New York, and to come on the same train with her and report to him. And if the peddler wanted a new stock of goods to keep him going Hanson would send them.

"I shall see you on the ship, my lady. You can't get away from me."

Meanwhile Owlet had safely passed the crisis of her illness, and was recovering slowly, very slowly. Her return to consciousness was very gradual and intermittent.

Though she was gathering some strength of body, she remained strangely feeble in intellect. She seemed to have forgotten the details of her abduction, but not the existence of her dear "Lady." She begged piteously to be taken back to her "darling Lady."

She was promised that she should go to her Lady as soon as she should be well enough to travel, and so she was put off from time to time.

Hanson told the nurse and the doctor that the lady she talked so much about had been her nursery governess, to whom she had been much attached; advised her to humor the child, yet warned her to try to divert Owlet's attention from the subject.

But that was quite impossible. "Lady" was the one absorbing subject of her thoughts by day, and of her dreams by night.

Owlet was a piteous little object as she sat propped up in a large, white, dimly-covered resting-chair, with her knees and feet wrapped around with a white coverlet. Her face was as pale and thin as a living face could be, and her great, brown eyes, which looked larger than ever in the little, pinched face, had taken on a pathetic, imploring expression which it was very sorrowful to see.

Hanson seemed very good to her. He bought her toys, picture books, trinkets, but she turned away

her sick eyes from them all, and pleaded to be taken home to Lady.

Later, when she was well enough to wear them, Hanson bought for her very pretty dresses, hats and coral necklaces and armlets. But she looked at them with weary, indifferent eyes, and prayed to be taken to Lady.

One beautiful, bright Saturday, when she was well enough to go out, Hanson got an open carriage and took her, with the nurse, to Central Park to hear the music.

To almost any child seeing it for the first time, especially on Saturday, with the bands of music and the thousands of children, and the variety of sports, the sunshine, the trees, the flowers, the lakes and ponds, it must have seemed the Garden of Eden revived—a heaven on earth.

But for homesick and heartsick, pale and large-eyed little Owlet it had no pleasures.

"Look how beautiful it is!" said Hanson. "Don't you like it?"

"Not half as well as Lady's garden! Oh, take me there!" pleaded the child.

"You shall go as soon as you are well enough," Hanson answered.

"Listen to the music, my dear. Isn't it delightful?" suggested the nurse, as the whole brass band struck up some jubilant martial air.

"I'd rather hear Lady sing 'Come Sound His Praise Abroad,' or Ducky Darling turn the little broken music box, than the whole of this! Oh! take me back to them!"

Again she was promised to have her will as soon as she should be able.

But Owlet was beginning to disbelieve in promises, and to lay out plans for herself—idiotic little plans, indeed.

The child was like some poor, little, forsaken, puzzled pet dog, pining for its absent mistress, not knowing how it had been separated from her, longing to find her, but ignorant where to look for her in all

the wilderness of the world, in all the despairful immensity of space.

And like this poor, silly, helpless little quadruped, Owlet felt an irresistible instinct to go away and look for her beloved all over the great earth until she should find her.

With a cunning beyond her years—a cunning, however, which is often found in connection with imbecility of mind, and even with idiocy—she concealed her purpose and watched for her opportunity.

Owlet was never left alone except when her nurse would go down to meals—fifteen minutes for breakfast, twenty for dinner—until sunset, when Mrs. Gilbert would put the child to bed, arrange her comfortably for the night, leave her safe in the little room, while generally Hanson would be reading or writing in the larger room, and go downstairs to join the other ladies' maids and children's nurses at their tea, and where all those whose duties, like those of Mrs. Gilbert, were over for the day, would remain gossiping together for an indefinite time.

This was the opportunity which the poor, forlorn, homesick child resolved to seize, on the first occasion on which Hanson also should be absent from the outer room.

The occasion came at length.

One afternoon in the early days of May, just as the sun was setting clear behind the hills of New Jersey, Mrs. Gilbert undressed Owlet, put her to bed, and then went down to her tea and her two hours' gossip. Soon after Hanson came in, dressed for a party, and kissed Owlet good-night. She heard him leave the room, and then she got out of bed and dressed herself in her very best clothes, and put on her prettiest coral necklace and armlets, and her finest hat, made up a little bundle of clothes and pinned them in a paper, and then left the room and went down—not by the elevator, but by the stairs—and passed from the house through the "ladies' entrance," without attracting any attention from anyone but the porter, who opened the door for her, without any suspicion

that there was anything irregular in her going out in that self-possessed, matter-of-fact manner.

The gas had just been lighted on the streets, and the scene was very brilliant. The shops were fairy palaces. But Owlet did not stop to look at any of them, she was much too eager to hurry to "Lady."

She had no idea of the distance that separated her from her beloved. Goblin Hall was out of the city among the trees somewhere. And people must know where it was, and she would inquire for it, as soon as she should see some one who was not in such an awful hurry as all the folks seemed to be on this street.

The Owlet of a month before would not have hesitated to stop the busiest man on the sidewalk and ask to be directed, but the Owlet of to-day was sad, subdued and timid, and so she walked a long distance down Broadway, until she came in sight of the trees in City Hall Park, and was ready to drop with fatigue, for she was still very weak. She had not found courage to speak to any of the crowd, until, at length, she saw an old woman, very old, very dirty, and very ragged, sitting on a cellar door, against the wall of a house, and with a huge bundle of foul-smelling rags on her lap.

Owlet only perceived the poverty, and not the wickedness of the personality before her. She said to herself:

"This old woman is not proud, nor busy, nor in a hurry. I will ask her, and I reckon she will know; and when I get to Goblin Hall I will have Lady give her some new clothes, and some——"

Then she stopped before the wretch, and said:

"Please, ma'am, will you show me the way to Goblin Hall?"

"Goblet which?" demanded the crone, who seemed to be rather deaf.

"Goblin Hall."

"Oh! Goblet Hall! I dunno sich a place. Is it a s'loon or mus'um?"

"I don't know what is a s'loon or mus'um, ma'am.

Goblin Hall is a fine house where Lady lives. It has trees, and flowers, and chickens and Ducky Darling. And, please, I am lost, and can't find it."

"Oh! you are lost?" inquired the crone, devouring, with her eyes the rich dress, the fine hat and the coral trinkets worn by the child, and the bundle carried in her hand.

"Yes, ma'am, please, lost; and I want to go home."

"Where did you say you wanted to go to?"

"To Goblin Hall, ma'am."

"Oh! I know the place! I'll take yer straight there, my little lady," said the hag, gloating over the finery of the child, and counting how many glasses of rum she could buy with the money for which she could pawn the hat, the dress, the coral ornaments, and the contents of the bundle.

"Oh! thank you, ma'am. Lady will——" Owlet was about to add, "pay you well for bringing me home," but an innate delicacy caused her to pause before offering so poor a woman pay for a kind action, and to say, instead—"will be ever so much obliged to you."

"All right. Come along o 'me," said the hag, hoisting her huge bundle upon her shoulders, rising and taking the child's hand.

CHAPTER XX

OWLET'S GREAT PERIL

"W'AT be yer sniffing at, young un?" demanded the horrible creature, as she drew the child along, hurrying as fast as she could down a narrow, crowded street leading out of East Broadway into, perhaps, the most poverty-stricken, squalid, Heaven-forsaken quarter of the city. "W'at be yer sniffing at?"

"You," quietly answered truthful Owlet, without a moment's hesitation, yet without meaning offense.

"Oh! Me! I'm not nice enough for you, ain't I, my fine little Feather?" inquired the crone.

Owlet looked at her.

She was a tall, large-boned, strong old woman, with harsh features, small, deep-set, pale gray eyes, dark, leathery skin, and straggling, iron-gray hair. She was clothed in a petticoat and sack, dark and thick of material, darker and thicker with accumulations of dirt, and half in rags. Over her head and shoulders she wore a very ragged old plaid shawl, with the pattern obliterated by dirt. On her shoulders she bore a huge bundle of rags—a ragpicker by trade, evidently, very poor probably, though some of her sort have been known to save and hoard large sums of money; very wicked, possibly, yet, in any case, to be more pitied than blamed, certainly. Who are we, who have received sane mental and moral natures from our forefathers, and have been trained amid favorable circumstances, to judge our less fortunate brothers and sisters of this world? We know so little. We can but have faith in the Lord and charity for them, and with all humility in ourselves.

"Not nice enough for you, eh?" repeated the woman, as they turned another corner and dived down another narrow, wretched street.

"Why don't you take a bath and put on clean clothes?" inquired Owlet.

"Why don't I take a bath and put on clean clothes? Oh, the innocent arsks me why I don't take a bath and put on clean clothes! Oh, he, he, he!" chuckled the ragpicker.

"Lady bathes and changes her clothes every blessed day. And so do I. Why don't you?" persisted Owlet, in the interests of health and cleanliness and—of her own nose.

"She and you is rich belike, and I be poor," replied the crone.

"But water is cheap enough. Everybody can get as much water as they want to wash with. Why don't you?"

"Well, then, Fine Feathers, I ain't the time to waste in washing. I has to work for my living, I has."

"Oh!" said the child, accepting the excuse and trying to understand it.

But she turned her head away from the ragpicker to try to catch a whiff of fresh air from the end of the street, that ran to the river.

"A-sniffing ag'in," said the hag.

"I can't help it, ma'am," Owlet said, in apology.

"Oh, she can't help sniffing! Fine Feathers can't help sniffing! He, he, he! If she can't 'elp sniffing out here in the hopen air, 'ow will she stand it in the 'ouse? Oh, deary me!" muttered the crone to nobody in particular, as she turned the last corner in their progress through this hell and entered a dark and narrow alley more poverty stricken, squalid and Heaven-forsaken than any thoroughfare they had yet passed.

The alley ran through the middle of an old city square, and was flanked on each side by dilapidated brick buildings that had once been the stables, coach houses, etc., of the rich dwellers in the mansions fronting on the streets of the square. But as these mansions had long been turned into stores, saloons and workshops, so the outhouses had been converted into tenements of the most objectionable description. But if there were no street lamps in this alley, neither was there a "dive" or a "bucket shop," which might account for the quietness as well as the darkness of the place.

The sun had so long set that even the twilight had faded away. No light reached the alley except from the distant lamps of the two streets upon which it opened, and from an occasional lamp in a few of the buildings.

So at this hour there was not much to be seen, but very much too much to be smelt, for a fetid gutter ran, or rather stagnated, through the middle of the alley, and seemed to be the receptacle of all the slops from all the wretched tenements on either side of the way.

These buildings were all in the last stages of dilapidation in which it was possible for human beings to

find shelter with safety. Walls were moldering away; doors and window shutters broken off their hinges or hanging by one hinge, or by a leather substitute; sashes without glass, and the place of it supplied with foul and pestilential rags.

It was a thickly crowded yet not a noisy place. In fact, it was so quiet and almost deserted that it was safe to suppose the wretched inhabitants who were not in the tumbling tenements were off to those favorite resorts, the "dives" and "bucket shops" of the neighboring streets.

Some very few miserable children, and fewer still of more miserable women, might be dimly seen, here and there, squatting on the falling front steps of the buildings, or loitering about them.

"I don't like this place," said Owlet, as soon as they had turned into the alley; "I don't like this place one bit. I wouldn't live here for a dollar. I didn't know we had to come through this place to get to Lady's house."

"Oh, yes, dearie little Fine Feathers. This is the way from where you came to where Lady lives—the honly way, too. You can't go no other way not at all," said the crone, in a conciliating tone.

"Oh, then I am so sorry. Oh, do let's get out of here as fast as we can—Oh, phew! what makes people live in such a nasty place as this when there is ever so much big, beautiful country in the world?" said Owlet, holding her nose between thumb and finger.

"Oh, the blooming innocent! she arsks why people live in such a nasty place as this? Lord, I wonder if she thinks they choose?" inquired the ragpicker of the universe at large. Then looking in contemptuous pity on the ignorance of her little companion, she answered to the point: "'Cause they can't 'elp it. They's too blooming poor to be let live anywhere else."

"Oh, I am so sorry for them! But, please hurry! I can walk faster if I try. This place does make me so sick!—sick at my stomach! I—I'm afraid I shall throw up presently," said Owlet, beginning to gag.

"Hold on, Feathers! Oh, hold on! We'll soon get there now! Here, smell this 'bacco," said the ragpicker, drawing from her bosom a quid of "Old Pig" and offering it to the child.

"Oh, no!—Oh, I can't!—It—I can't!—Oh, please hurry!" panted the child, in great bodily distress.

"Well, now, if as 'ow yer can't 'bide this one minnit, 'ow do yer think the poor souls as 'ave to live here all the blooming days of their lives—day in and day out, night in and night out—can a-bear it?" demanded, and not without reason, the animated mass of rags and filth by Owlet's side.

"Oh, the poor people! Oh, I am so awful sorry for them! I will ask Lady as soon as ever I get home to take them out of this horrid place, and give them lovely houses and sweet gardens in the beautiful country. Lady is awful rich, you know! And good! Oh, so good! You don't know—oh, you don't know how good she is!" said Owlet, with a philanthropist's enthusiasm, forgetting her disgust in her ardor.

"And she'll do it!" exclaimed the crone, with a harsh laugh of scornful incredulity—"Oh, she'll do it! You may depend she'll do it! I never seed her face to face, but I know as she'll do every bit of it."

"Yes, indeed, she will!" replied ignorant and confident Owlet; but she faltered as she spoke, and began to totter as she walked, for the stench of that pest place was penetrating, acrid, insistent. Owlet was again overpowered.

"Oh, please—go fast—hurry—hurry—out of this—or I shall—drop down—dead!" she gasped.

"Yes, my pretty litle Fine Feathers; in one minute. You see, I live here, dearie—I——"

"You!" exclaimed the child, momentarily revived by her astonishment, and interrupting the hag's speech; but the next instant wondering at herself for being the least surprised, for it seemed so natural that this creature should live in just this place.

"Yes," said the ragpicker, "I bide here, dearie, and I just want to step inter my place one minnit to get my bunnit to put on my head, to dress myself up in

it, you know, so as to be decent to go afore genteel folks like your lady is."

She stopped before the very worst of all the rookeries in that alley, if that could be said of a house in a place where all houses were as bad as bad could be, and every one worse than the other—so to speak.

"Come along o' me, Fine Feathers," said the hag, leading the unfortunate child up a short flight of rickety, shaking steps, and through a front door that stood wide open, into a hall that was even a little more filthy than the alley from which they had entered.

The only light within it gleamed through partly open doors of tenement rooms on either side, with interiors indescribably squalid, and from which came odors insupportably nauseous. The tenement, in fact, seemed to be a colony of ragpickers.

The dim, gleaming light from the doors ajar showed a narrow, moldering, broken staircase that led to the floor above.

"Come along o' me now, dearie," said the crone, in a coaxing tone, as she took a faster hold on the child's hand and began to draw her up the stairs.

"Oh!—if you please—do take me—out of this—I—I—am dy—dy——"

And here Owlet fainted away, succumbing to the weakness of an imperfect convalescence, to great weariness, and, finally, to the deadly fetor of the pestilential house.

"There! by jingo!" exclaimed the crone, as she picked up the child, still very thin and light from her recent illness, and easily carried her up the rickety stairs, that creaked and bent under her footsteps, to the upper hall, which was flanked each side by tenement rooms, through whose partly open doors gleamed flickering lights and streamed foul odors.

"This here is better nor I could 'oped. Saves a desprit deal o' trouble," said the ragpicker, as she bore the unconscious child to the rear of the hall, and paused at a door on the left-hand side, which she pushed open with her foot.

It gave into a very small room, no bigger than a good-sized closet. It had but one window, a small, rear window, partly lighted by a distant lamp that stood in line with it on a cross street. The only furniture consisted of a huge pile of inconceivably foul rags that lay on the floor in one corner, reached halfway up to the low ceiling, and spread more than halfway over the floor.

The woman laid the child down on the edge of the pile of rags, and found a match and an end of candle, which she lighted and stuck into the neck of an empty beer bottle.

"I must make haste and git rid on her afore she comes to, and then she won't give no trouble to nobody. Lor', 'ow lucky she swooned hoff in this here way! Lor', to think as 'ow I have been 'elped this day in this onexpected manner! First, I comes upon this here fine bird, with fine feathers, lost into the streets, and with waluable jewelry onto her neck, and a waluable bundle into her hand—and where is that bundle, by the same token? 'Opes it never dropped on the stairs. No! Lor', there it is, hanging onto Fine Feathers' arm still. Never dropped hoff when she fainted, and I picked her up! Oh! w'at luck this is! And to find the fortin in the street! And to bring her here! And jest as I were a-thinking how on airth I could get the clothes offen her back 'thout her raising the whole alley, she jest faints away like a angel, so quiet and comfortable! It do seem like a providence, it do, indeed it do! I wonder what's in that bundle? But I ain't got time to look now. Lor', no. I must get Fine Feathers outen this afore she comes to, or there'll be trouble. Lor', yes," concluded the crone, as she hastily drew Owlet's bundle off her arm and hid it far under the pile of rags.

She need not have been in such haste. The swooning child was not likely to recover in that deadly room. She was much more likely to die as people die in the fumes of escaping gas or burning charcoal in an airtight place.

The ragpicker sat down flat upon the floor, and

drew the unconscious child gently across her lap, and proceeded to divest her of her costly trinkets and rich clothing, all of which she made into a bundle and thrust it far under the pile of rags.

Then she looked at the beautiful, nude statue of a child that lay upon the floor, and considered:

"'Twon't do to take her out that-a-way. But w'at shall I put onto her? Not a child's garment in all that pile. Oh! I know," she suddenly mumbled. "I roll her in my shawl. I can get another one to-morrow outen the fortin I have come inter. Them there jew'ls and frock and things'll fetch a pile, I know."

Saying this, she took off her own ragged shawl, laid it over her knees, drew the nude and senseless form of the child upon it, and rolled her up in it, securing it here and there by scraps of strings drawn from the pile, and run through the holes of the wrap.

"That'll do," she said, as she took little Owlet in her arms, laid her head over her shoulder and left the room, on this occasion taking the precaution to lock the door and put the key in her bosom.

"I never do lock my door, except when I'm gwine to bed; but I guess I'll do it now, fear of accidents. Though nobody'll never guess nothing 'bout the fortin as I've got locked up in there. Lor', no! They'll only think, if any on 'em come and try my door, as I've turned in airlier, and some on 'em liars'll say drunker nor usual. They'll never think of the fortin. Lor', no! If they did, it wouldn't be there long. Lor', no! So I reckon as I had better hurry and get back's soon as I can, anyhow," she concluded, as she went down the stairs, dark or only dimly lighted by the gleam of candles, or kerosene lamps, from the partly open doors of the tenement rooms.

She passed downstairs without being questioned, or even observed, until she reached the front door, where a woman sat on the steps, smoking a short, clay pipe.

"Umphe—humphe! There's Kit, as us'al, filling up

the door," muttered the ragpicker, as she came upon the smoker.

The latter took the pipe from between her lips, looked up, and said:

"Evenin'! What's that you've got there, Muck?" calling the crone by the nickname that had been given her in recognition of her pre-eminent attainments in squalor.

At any other time the Malabolge of her poor, obscene and profane soul would have been turned upon the questioner and deluged her with abuse. But it was now her cue to be conciliating.

"Oh, jest one of my Soph's young uns as has been spending of the hevening and taking tea along of me. And I'm a-carrying of her home to her mammy," she answered, quite civilly.

"I ain't seen Soph since she come from the island. Where is she now?" inquired the younger woman.

"Got a room in Rose Street."

"Bloomin' Rose Street that one is. He-he! Where is Soph's man?"

"W'ere he ought to be. W'ere I 'ope he'll stay."

"Sent up?"

"Yes."

"Drinking?"

"Yes, and beating of his wife. Wish I'd caught him at it. Better not let me catch him when he comes out, either. There'll be a foot race or a fun'al. More like the fun'al. And me sent furder up nor him, I reckon—for manslaughter it mought be, and serve him right. But, here! Let me pass. It's arfter nine, and I want to get along with Soph's kid, 'fear she'll be oneasy 'bout her. 'Cause, yer see, she don' know w'ere she is. I picked her up in the streets, and fetched her home to take tea 'long of me," the ragpicker explained.

"Oh! to take tea long of you?" Kit questioned, with a dry laugh.

"Yes, why not?" demanded the crone.

"Oh, nothing. Only I was wondering what stood for

tea, and what on earth it was made in and drunk out of. That's all."

The ragpicker would have liked to strangle the young woman then and there, but she dared not even quarrel with her, so she answered, with a forced laugh:

"Oh, yer will have your jokes, Kit. Well, to be sure the tea were only a bottle of ginger beer, drunk outen the bottle, and a bun eat outen the hand. I forgive yer yer little joke, Kit, my lass. But I haven't got time to stop now. I must take the child home."

Kit laughed, replaced the pipe in her mouth, and moved aside.

The ragpicker passed out to the alley with Owlet in her arms, the child's head over the woman's shoulder.

The crone would have been made anxious by the child's long swoon, but that she felt the gentle motion of the little one's lungs against her own breast.

She walked down to the end of the alley, and turned the corner into a crowded street leading down to the East River.

The fresh night breeze from the sea began to revive the fainting child, who moved and sighed.

"There, there, dearie, it's all right. Don't be afeared, my pretty little Lady Fine Feathers. It's only me toting of you home to your dear Lady. Yes, dearie," whispered the thief.

The exhausted child, scarcely cognizant of herself—not at all of her surroundings—heaved a deep sigh of weariness, and subsided into quietness.

The ragpicker walked on, watching her opportunity to drop and leave the child when she could feel sure of doing so without being observed.

She met and passed, jostled and was jostled by many foot passengers on the sidewalks, and she saw and was seen by several policemen, any one of whom would have stopped and "run her in" had he had the slightest suspicion of the crime she was committing. But the sight of a ragged woman with a ragged child

in her arms was a sight too common to draw remark, much less to excite suspicion.

The ragpicker, however, soon left the more crowded and busier street, and turned into a less frequented and quieter one.

She knew all the mazes in the labyrinth of that quarter, and she turned and wound among them like the crawling serpent that might have been her type.

At length she found what she had been seeking from the time she had set out on her walk with the child in her arms—a narrow, quiet street that seemed at this hour to be deserted of all pedestrian life. Lights gleamed from the windows of the tall tenements on either side; but no one seemed to be abroad.

Here she looked up and down the street, and then sat down on a cellar door, against the front wall of one of the tallest houses, shifted the position of the child from her shoulder to her knees, and took another survey of her surroundings.

One solitary pedestrian came down the same sidewalk where she sat with the child on the cellar door, and passed by within two feet of her without perceiving her in the deep shadows.

When he was gone the thoroughfare was vacant. The stage was waiting, so to speak.

The old wretch seized the opportunity. She raised the sleeping child and stood up, looked about, and prepared to lay her under the steps of the front stoop beside the cellar door, when, to her confusion, Owlet moved, awoke, lifted her head and inquired:

"Are we almost there?"

The woman knew now that she must soothe and deceive the child with some plausible pretext for leaving her alone for a minute—a minute in which she should make her retreat. Else, if she did not do this, the child would be frightened, would cry, and—though she saw no policeman—there might be one not too far off. So she answered:

"Yes, dearie. Pretty little Lucky Fine Feathers, we is almost there. In fact, almost at the door. But will you jest bide quiet here a minnit while I go over there

and ask that boy which is the best way to get 'round to the house?"

"Is it a black boy?" Owlet inquired, unconsciously asking a leading question.

"Yes, dearie, werry black," answered the ragpicker, intelligently following the lead.

"Then that is Puck—poor, dear, old Puck! But he's not a boy really, though they call him so, because he's so little, I s'pose, or because they forgot to call him anything else. But he is a man grown, a married man, too, and Ducky Darling's uncle," said Owlet, brightly.

"Oh! is he? Then I'll go and speak to him directly," said the ragpicker.

"Oh, do! And tell him you have found me. And tell him I want to see them all awful bad, and I'm coming home directly. And, oh! won't he be glad? And won't Lady and Ducky Darling and all of them be glad? Just as glad as I shall be. For, oh! I know they have all been grieving about me as much as I have been about them. Now we shall be so glad! And you shall be glad, too. And the poor people in that horrid place—I must have gone dead again. How did you get me out of it?" suddenly inquired Owlet, trying to piece together the broken threads of her memory.

"Brung you out of it, dearie, while you was in a dead faint," said the woman, impatient to be off.

"That—must—have—been so," said the child, very solemnly—then she added: "Oh, the poor people what have to live there all the time! I don't believe Lady knows about it, or she wouldn't let them. But I'll tell her. And she will take them out of it, and you, too, and everybody shall be glad. Lady is like an angel in heaven in her lovely home and garden. She don't know anything about such——"

"Hells!" added the crone. "And now I'll go and fetch the black boy to tote you home."

"Oh, yes; go," said Owlet, eagerly.

The crone turned away, muttering to herself:

"She'll do. 'Tain't a cold night for the last of April. And she's well wrapped up in my ole shawl,

too. Lor', yes. And the perlice'll find her presently, and then she'll be took to the station and took care on. And, Lor', it's little account she can give of herself to they. It's little account she could give to me, as was like a gran'mother to her, toting her in my arms as if she'd been one of Soph's own kids. And, after all, the Ventures of Cruelty will care on her till her own people turn up. Lor', yes. She'll be all right. No fear for her; them rich allers falls onto their feet, somehows," concluded the ragpicker.

And with this "flattering unction" laid to her paralyzed but not quite deadened conscience, she turned the next corner and wound in and out through the labyrinth of streets and alleys that lay between the spot on which she had left the desolate child and the den which she called her home.

She reached the room at length, opened the door, lighted her stump of tallow candle, and searched for her stolen booty in the pile of rags.

She found them safe. She drew them out and gloated over them.

Finally she selected the coral necklace for immediate investment and replaced all the other treasures under the malodorous pile of rags.

Then she went forth again, and on this occasion to the nearest pawnbroker's shop.

Here she pledged the necklace for two dollars, with which she bought, at the next groggery, a half gallon of uncommonly poisonous whisky, even as whisky goes, and then she went back to her den with joyful anticipations to lock herself in and have what she called "a glorious drunk" all to herself.

Meanwhile Owlet, hidden under the front steps of that tall house, waited fearlessly and patiently, without the slightest idea that she had been left to her fate.

But now the change in her clothing, which in her intense interest in the prospect of getting home to "Lady's house" she had scarcely noticed before, began to trouble her. It irritated her skin and offended

her nose. Still the foul envelope did not suggest foul play to the unsuspicious child.

"It must have rained while I was gone dead," she said to herself, "and that poor, ragged woman took off my wet clothes and hung them up to dry, and wrapped me in her poor old shawl. It was all she had, too, poor thing. And it was very good of her. Still, I do wish she hadn't. I would rather be soaked to the skin than be so very, very nasty."

Just then a policeman passed on his beat. Owlet saw him on the lighted sidewalk, but she did not know him for a policeman, and he did not see her, all in the deep shadow of the stoop.

Still she waited patiently, almost stupidly. It was strange that she felt no fear, for she did not; strange, also, that she was growing indifferent, almost unconscious of her noisome change of clothes, for she was. She was becoming dazed and stupefied by her present state and by all that she had gone through since her flight, and even before she was driven to that flight which was so desperate a venture for a child only six years old.

Sometimes she dozed and started, waked up suddenly, and tried to gather her scattered thoughts, and wondered why it took so long a time for her new friend to fetch Puck.

"Oh, I reckon they have gone on to the house to tell Lady I am found, and to fetch the carriage to take me home, for, after all, the house must be a good way off from here for me to walk, or for Puck to carry me. And Lady will come herself, I know."

With this thought in her mind, the weary child sank to sleep, and dreamed of being in "Lady's" garden of delight, among the glorious flowers, or down the gooseberry walk, or beside the coop where the bantam "chickies" ran in and out, with Ducky Darling cooing to them. So passed the hours of that April night.

CHAPTER XXI

WILL HARCOURT'S ADVENTURE

When Will Harcourt had answered Roma Fronde's confiding and affectionate note by a letter of vague confession and final renunciation, he looked upon his own life as "done and finished," so far as any hope in the future was concerned.

What had he to live for?

Roma, his adored, his ideal woman, his muse, his goddess, was lost to him forever! was worse than lost, for she was repulsed, repudiated, and by himself.

His youthful ambition was gone forever; was worse than gone, for it was turned to humiliation, and by his own act.

Oh, misery! Oh, misery!

What had he to live for, indeed?

What?

For one bitter end! To expiate his sin! To toil hard at the roughest sort of work, among honest laborers, with whom he did not feel good enough to associate, to look forward to nothing better than the coming of that bitter day which should deprive him of his only friend in the death of his aged mother, and leave him free to deliver his conscience of his guilty secret, nay, constrain him to denounce himself as a criminal, to give himself up to justice, to be dealt with according to law, to suffer—what penalty?

Imprisonment, with penal servitude, for the term of his natural life, must be the lightest doom that could be meted out to him, as the measure of his great offense.

For the term of his natural life. And he was but twenty-four years old! A half century of imprisonment and penal slavery.

Well, let it come, he thought, not defiantly, indeed, but humbly. He had deserved it all. And, long as

it might last, it would end some time. And there was an after life, where faith, repentance and reformation in this world would surely be followed by rest, peace and joy in that world to come, where, also, as some believed, true lovers severed here would meet to part no more forever, because from their creation their souls had been essentially one, though apparently two.

And, if this should be true, as some deep inspiration whispered that it surely was—man might bear patiently, hopefully, courageously all that the world, the flesh and the devil might inflict upon him even the hardest of all to bear the disgrace and penalty of his own sin and folly.

In this mood of mind Harcourt reached New York late one evening toward the last of April.

He went directly to his lodgings, passed up the four flights of stairs to the attic floor, and paused a moment in the passage before his own and his neighbor's door.

There he heard the old, familiar thumper-thumper-thumper-thumper of Annie Moss' sewing machine, going on as he had heard it all the time he had lived in the next room, as he had heard it on the evening he had taken leave of her, as if it had never stopped during the three weeks of his absence.

"Oh, these poor working women!" he thought. "How patient they are, at their monotonous work! What a lesson it is to others."

He rapped at the door.

"Well! Who is it?" inquired the pleasant voice, as the sound of the machine stopped.

"It is I, Annie," he answered.

Although she was old enough to be his mother, he had got to calling her "Annie," because everybody else did, so far as he knew—Adler and Adler's wife and their children, all called Mrs. Moss Annie. The name seemed to suit the fair, gentle, helpful woman.

"Oh, Mr. William, I am so glad that you have come back," she said, as she opened the door.

"And I am very glad to see you. I hope you are well?"

"Oh, very well, thank you, Mr. William. I am always well, you know."

"And happy?"

"Yes, and happy."

"You deserve to be so."

"I don't know that I do. I hope you left your mother well, Mr. William."

Harcourt sighed.

"As well as most women are at her advanced age. My dear mother is nearer eighty than seventy, you must know."

"Then so much nearer to her eternal youth," sweetly and solemnly replied Annie Moss.

"Yes," assented Harcourt, in a low tone, "that is all she has to comfort her now—the prospect of the future better life."

"Many young people, as well as the aged, have nothing else to hope for."

"That is indeed true, Annie; but I do not know how so good and happy a woman as yourself should have found it out," said Harcourt.

"Come in, Mr. William, and sit down and rest yourself, while I make a cup of tea that will refresh you after your journey."

"No, thank you. Not now. I only came to see how you are, and to get my key," replied the young man.

"But your room has been shut up, and without a fire in it for nearly a month, and though I have aired it two or three times a week I know it is cold and damp, and you are just off a long journey. You had better come in, and let me get you a cup of tea, and after you have taken it you will feel better able to tackle with a damp room and a cold hearth. Come in, now. Why not? Are we not all brethren and sisters?"

"Oh! my dear Annie, you are really too good for this world," said Harcourt, very stupidly, it must be admitted, for he even thought so himself, yet in perfect good faith.

"Nonsense! There are no provisions laid up in your room, either, and I'd like to know what you expect to do about supper at this time of night, when all the stores are closed?"

Harcourt smiled, and submitted.

Although Annie Moss called her neighbor so formally "Mr. William," she really considered him as something like a foster son.

She made him sit down in the only armchair, where he drew off his gloves, put them in his hat, set that on the floor, and made himself comfortable, while Annie filled her kettle and set it on the stove, and laid a clean cloth on the table in preparation for tea.

"How is work now, Annie?" he inquired, while she flitted from cupboard to table, and back and forth.

"Plentiful with me; I have just as much as I can jump at," she answered, brightly.

"And work fourteen hours out of the twenty-four."

"Sometimes, yes. It don't hurt me. I always sleep so well."

"I am glad to hear it. How is work with Adler?"

"Oh, he has got a steady job on the new railroad."

"I am very glad to hear that, too."

"Isn't it strange, Mr. William, that Adler has never been out of work a day since that night when you saved his life. Oh! it must be a glorious thing to save life—especially the life of a young father of a family!" said Annie Moss.

"How do you know I saved his life, Annie?"

"Oh! why, Adler told me himself; and so did his wife. They have told dozens of people. They will never forget the 'good turn' you did him, as they call it; and they say, besides, it turned his luck, for he has never been out of employment since; and now he has got a job on the new railroad."

"I wonder if I could work on that road?"

"Yes, I think so. Adler told me only last night that they wanted more laborers," said Annie Moss, as she set the tea to draw, and placed plates of bread, butter and cold corned beef on the table.

Poor and plain as was her home in the attic of

the four-storied tenement house, Annie Moss lived better than most of the needle-women in the city. She had no one but herself to support, and as she slept well, ate well and lived cleanly, she had good health and great capacity for work.

When the feast was spread she invited Harcourt to draw up his chair—the armchair in which he sat, she said, for he would be more comfortable in that.

He obeyed her gratefully.

She also sat down at the table, saying that she had not yet taken her own tea and would join him.

Annie Moss was pleased to see that her guest made a very satisfactory supper.

After it was finished, Harcourt thanked his hostess, and, as it was now very late, asked for the key of his room.

Annie got it for him, and then lighted a candle and gave it to him. He thanked her, bade her good-night, and went to his apartment. He found the place as damp, chilly and comfortless as Annie had predicted.

"If I had had the sense to write to this good woman, and named the day I was to come back, she would have had everything ready for me, fire made and room aired," he said to himself, as he raised the window looking out on the bay, and went to the cupboard, from the floor of which he got some waste paper and kindlings, which he piled on the cold hearth, and lighted from the candle Annie had given him with the key.

He had soon a bright blaze without a hot fire.

And between the open window and the blazing hearth the atmosphere of the room was soon improved.

Then, about midnight, he retired to bed. But he was an uneasy sleeper, and had been so ever since that fatal fifteenth of September, when he fell under the power of the tempter and descended into the inferno.

He passed a restless night, and with the earliest dawn of day he arose and dressed himself, went out

to buy his breakfast, came in in a few minutes, kindled his fire, made his coffee and cooked his chops.

When he had eaten his meal and set his room in order, he took his hat and set out to see Adler, and find out what was his chance of getting work.

It was still very early in the morning; the sun but newly risen.

He found Adler at breakfast, surrounded by his family.

They all started up from the table to welcome their returned friend.

Adler pressed him to join them at the meal; but Harcourt thanked him, and declined upon the reasonable ground that he had just finished his own breakfast.

He took the chair that one of the children brought him, and sat down, answering all their kindly questions about his mother and himself, and asking some few of them concerning their welfare, until at last Adler arose from the table to go to his work.

"You'll excuse me, William. It is after six o'clock, and you know I have to go," he said.

"I will walk with you as far as the car," Harcourt answered.

"All right. I shall be glad to have your company."

Harcourt bade good-by to the family, and the two men walked out together."

On their way, Harcourt made known his wish to get work on the road.

"I don't understand you, William! I don't, indeed! I can't see the use of a highly educated man like you hankering after this sort of work, hanged if I can!" said Adler.

"We have discussed this subject before, my friend. You know my mind," replied the young man.

"Well, then, get in the car with me, and come along up. The contractor wants more hands than he can get just now. And—here comes our car."

As the car approached the crossing Adler hailed it.

Both men boarded it, and were soon on their way uptown.

Harcourt found no difficulty in getting work. He was taken on at once.

And from this day his routine of hard, daily labor began.

He wrote regularly to his mother, two letters each week, and he heard from her frequently, either by notes from herself or from Margaret Wynthrop. He knew that the aged lady continued in fair bodily health, though she did not improve in mental strength. His only satisfaction in thinking of her was that she was happy, comfortable, well cared for, and without the slightest suspicion of the straits to which her poor, only son had been reduced.

So he labored on—humbly, patiently, heroically, as one waiting for an anticipated but an unknown denouément.

And what denouément?

He had acquired a habit, forced upon him by circumstances, of retiring early at night and rising with the dawn of day. He sometimes took a walk before breakfast, then returned and prepared his frugal meal, ate sparingly, set his room in order and started for his day's work.

One morning he arose from a very restless bed, much earlier than usual, dressed himself and went down the four flights of stairs to the ground floor.

None of his fellow lodgers were yet stirring.

He opened the front door and looked out.

The street was as quiet as a churchyard. The sky was just beginning to grow faintly light.

Harcourt closed the door behind him, and went down the steps.

As he reached the sidewalk he heard a low moan and sob.

He stopped in surprise to listen and look up and down the street.

But he could see no one.

The moan and sob were repeated so near him that,

as there was no one in sight, it seemed weird, ghostly, supernatural.

He looked all around the doorstep, but still saw nothing.

The moan and sob were reiterated with the tearful wail:

"Oh, why don't she come? Why don't she come?"

Then, at length, he was able to locate the voice. It came from under the stoop.

He bent down and looked there. And first he smelt, and then he saw a little creature wrapped up in a noisome rag or shawl, he could not tell which, and she was moaning, and sobbing, and crying:

"Why don't she come? Oh, why don't she come?"

He bent lower, and inquired, gently:

"What is the matter, little one?"

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know why she don't come back!" sobbed the child.

"Who do you mean?" inquired Harcourt.

"Oh! she—she—she!"

"Who is she?"

"Oh, I don't know. She was a ragged woman, and smelt awful."

"What did she do to you?"

"Oh, she took off my nice clothes, but I reckon they were wet, and she wrapped me up in this nasty shawl, and she left me here and said she would come back and carry me to Lady. But she never came, and I am so chilly, and so hungry, and so sick at my stomach with the smell of this shawl. I am almost dead. Oh, dear me!"

"Come out here, little girl, and let me see you," said Harcourt, kindly.

The child seemed perfectly fearless. All her horrible experiences had not had the power to make a coward of her.

She crawled out, tottered to her feet, and stood before him—a little creature clothed only in an old, ragged, foul shawl, reaching from her shoulders to her knees, leaving exposed to view the fair head and

neck, and the delicate ankles and feet of a beautiful girl child.

She looked something like a small, old-fashioned chimney sweep, wrapped in his sooty, little blanket, except for the loveliness of her fair face and hands.

"Foul play!" exclaimed Harcourt, as he took in the whole incongruous picture at a glance.

"How long have you been lying under that stoop, poor child?" he inquired.

"Oh! I don't know. I went to sleep. I just woke up a little while ago. Oh, sir, please do take me to Lady," pleaded the child.

"Who is Lady, my dear?"

"Oh, she is Lady, you know, Lady."

"But what is her name?"

"I—don't—think—I—quite—know."

"But what do other people call her? Everyone does not call her Lady, I suppose?"

"No—nobody but me. I call her Lady. But the black people do call her 'young mist'ess,' and Mr. Merritt and Dr. Shaw call her 'Roma, my dear'."

Harcourt started.

"'Roma?'—'Dr. Shaw?'—'Mr. Merritt?' What does all this mean?" he muttered to himself in strong agitation. Then:

"Where does this lady live, my child?" he asked, in a shaking voice.

"Oh! at Goblin Hall. Such a lovely place! Oh, sir, please—oh! please do take me home to my own dear Lady!" pleaded the child, putting her little, white hands together and looking up in his face.

"Yes, yes, you shall be restored to your Lady," he said. "This is very strange. I cannot comprehend it at all. But I know that I must succor this little one," he thought, as he lifted the unresisting child to his shoulder and carried her up the four flights of stairs to his room.

CHAPTER XXII

WILL HARCOURT'S WAIF

It was growing lighter. A bright dawn, shining over the bay and into the back windows, lighted up the room.

Harcourt laid the child down on his white bed, shrinking involuntarily from the offensiveness of the foul rag that wrapped her.

"And she talks of Roma, and Mr. Merritt, and Dr. Shaw! It is very strange. I cannot comprehend it all. But I will appeal to Annie. Annie will be able to learn more from her than I could," he said to himself.

"Oh, please, sir, will you give me something to eat?" asked the child.

"Yes, dear. Are you so very hungry?" kindly inquired Harcourt.

"Oh! so hungry—so very hungry! I never was so hungry in all my life before. I am all sunk in, and my stomach has all gone to my backbone—it has, indeed, though you mayn't believe it."

"What would you like to have, dear?"

"Bread and butter, with sugar on it," promptly replied the child.

Harcourt went to his corner cupboard and brought out a pitcher of milk and a loaf of bread.

He cut a slice, spread it with butter, then with sugar, and placed it on a plate; then filled a cup with milk, and took the repast to his little guest.

She sat up on the side of the bed to eat it.

"When did you leave your lady?" he inquired, as he seated himself on a chair near her.

"Oh! I don't know. I—I—I—— No! it's no use—I don't know. It was—was—ever so long ago," sighed the child.

"Were you lost?"

"Yes; I lost myself. I went out to try to find Lady; and she found me."

"Lady found you?"

"Oh, no; of course not! If Lady had found me I shouldn't be here, looking this way," said the elf, rather indignantly.

"Then who found you?"

"The nasty old woman, of course."

"Ah! And what then?"

"I did ask her the way to Goblin Hall, and she told me she would go with me and show me the way."

"Oh! And what next did she do?"

"Oh, she took hold of my hand and led me a long way through such nasty streets, and to the nastiest house you ever saw in all your life. It made me awful ill all over."

"And what did you do, you poor child?"

"I went dead—stone dead!" said the little guest, and then she paused in her speech and applied herself diligently to the "bread and butter with sugar on it."

"But you came to life again," said Harcourt, with a smile.

"Oh, yes; I came to life again," said the imp, with her mouth full of bread and butter with sugar on it. "I always do. I'm used to it—I mean, I am getting used to it."

"Used to what, my dear?"

"Used to going dead and coming to life again. I know it sounds as if I wasn't possessed of common sense to say so, but it is the truth, for all that. I have been dead several times since I lost Lady," added the elf, with a deep sigh.

"Do you mean you fainted?"

"Fainted? I don't know what you are talking about 'fainted.' I went dead—stone dead—dead as a door-nail! and I've gone dead two or three times, and the last time I was dead was in that horrid, nasty house."

"And when you came to life again——"

"Oh, yes; when I came to life again I was out in the street, wrapped up in this—phew!—shawl, and lying on the ragged old woman's lap, and she sitting on the cellar door, close by the stoop where you

found me," said the child, and then she stopped to take a draught of milk from the cup.

"And so you found that all your nice clothes had been taken off you, and this ragged shawl wrapped around you?"

"Yes; but, you see, I reckon it rained while I was dead, and my clothes must have got wet. and that poor, old, ragged woman took off my wet clothes and hung 'em to dry, and put her own poor shawl round me. I do think she had nothing else to wrap me up in, poor old thing, and it was good in her to do it, too. But, all the same, I wish she hadn't; I'd rather be soaked to the skin than wear anything so nasty—wouldn't you?"

"I think I should," answered the young man, quite sincerely.

"It's awful, you know—just awful! But one must have patience. Oh! what will Lady say to me when she sees me in this?"

"We must try to get you a nice suit of clothes to take you in to Lady."

"Oh! will you—will you? That will be so jolly nice! Thank you ever so much, sir."

"Where did that woman leave you, my dear?"

"Oh, just where you found me."

"What did she say when she left you?"

"Didn't I tell you? She said she was going to ask a boy to tell her which was the nearest way to get to the house."

"Which house?"

"Lady's house."

"My dear, do you mean Goblin Hall?"

"'Course I do. Everybody knows Lady's house is named Goblin Hall."

"And do you think it is anywhere near this place?"

"I don't know. I reckon it is. Not among the houses, though. Among the hills, and woods, and the trees and flowers. That's where Lady's house is."

By this time the elfin child had eaten up all her "bread and butter with sugar on it," and had drank

up all her milk, and seemed satisfied—for the time being, at least.

Harcourt began to prepare his own breakfast. He heard his neighbor in the next room preparing hers.

"I will speak to Annie before I go to work," he said to himself, as he went about his task.

When his breakfast of coffee, bread, butter and chops was on the table, he turned to the child, and said:

"Now, then, would you like to sit up to the table and have some breakfast with me?"

"Oh, yes; please! What you did give me was awful good, but it only stayed my stomach. I don't think I ever got so hungry again so soon after eating in all my born days."

"Come, then," he said, as he lifted her up, folded the tattered wrap more closely around her, sat her in a chair and pushed the chair to the table.

He helped the child first.

"She must have been half famished," he said to himself, as he noticed the avidity with which she consumed the food placed before her; for he did not know that she had but recently recovered from a long and severe illness and had the appetite of a healthy convalescent.

"Well, I must leave her in the care of Annie to-day. Our Annie will be able to get more information out of her in one hour than I could in a year," he reflected.

Before he had finished his meal he heard the thumper-thumper-thumper-thumper of his neighbor's indefatigable sewing machine in full blast.

As soon, therefore, as he had risen from the table and put his room in order, and given the child some old picture papers to look at, he thought he would go and see Annie.

He felt the strongest possible temptation to stay home that day to investigate the interesting mystery —to him—of this child picked up in the streets of New York, who could talk of nothing else, and of no one else, but Roma, Dr. Shaw and Mr. Merritt, whose homes were in Western Maryland or in Washington

City; but he did not yield to that temptation. He had laid down for himself an iron-cast rule of life, to go daily to his hard labor, as though, indeed, he were under prison discipline for penal servitude.

So he resisted the temptation to stay at home, and resolved to leave the child and the solution of the problem to his neighbor for this day.

Then he went to her door and knocked and called.

The sound of the sewing machine stopped in an instant, and the pleasant voice of the woman demanded:

"Well, what is it, Mr. William? What can I do for you?"

"Come here, dear heart, I wish to speak to you at once," Harcourt said.

Annie started up and came and opened the door.

"What is it, Mr. William?" she inquired again.

"Oh, Annie, I have picked up a wretched child out of the street—out of the gutter, I might say—under our very doorstep here," Harcourt replied.

"A child! A baby?" exclaimed Annie, staring.

"Yes!—No!—that is, a little girl of about five or six or seven years old. I am no judge of children's ages."

"Lost?"

"It is hard to say. Lost, or dropped, or stolen, I am not sure which. But robbed of her clothing certainly."

"Well, don't stand there in the hall. Come in here, Mr. William, and sit down and tell me all about it. Where is the child?" Annie inquired.

Harcourt went into the room, took the chair she offered, sat down and said:

"The child is in my apartment. I think she must have been stolen for blackmailing, or other evil purposes, from a country house away down South in Maryland, and brought to New York! then ran away from her abductor and lost herself in this city, was picked up by a female thief, beguiled into some den, robbed of her clothing and abandoned in these streets.

There, that is my theory; but I am not sure it is the correct one."

"Poor little thing! What can I do for her? I will do anything in the world. Do you want me to take care of her while you go and inform the police?" inquired the gentle woman, in a tone of ready sympathy and helpfulness.

Harcourt hesitated. Then:

"I never once thought of the police," he said, slowly. And, after a thoughtful pause: "No," he said, "I do not think I shall trouble the police with this child's care; at least not just yet a while. The fact is, Annie, that I have strong reasons for believing that this girl is the protégée of a Southern lady whom I once knew. And I hope to be able to restore the child to her without the unpleasant publicity which an application to the police would involve."

"Yes?" said his neighbor, interrogatively.

"Yes. But you see there are difficulties. I am not quite sure of the truth of my theory. The child is, besides, very young, ignorant, and mentally confused. She cannot give a clear account of herself, at least in answer to my own questions; but, then, I am not used to children, do not know how to question them, least of all do I know how to cross-examine them." Harcourt hesitated, in perplexity.

"What do you wish me to do, Mr. William? Indeed, I should be very glad to be of any use at all in this case. I have so little opportunity of doing any good," said the seamstress, earnestly.

"I wanted you—but I am afraid it will take up too much of your time—to have this little waif in here with you to-day, while I shall be away to my day's work, and to draw from her, as you women know so well how to do, the whole truth about herself and her friends, and the manner in which she was separated from them."

"I will take her in with pleasure. And I will do my very best by her," heartily responded the seamstress.

"Thank you, Annie. I thank you very much. This

is for the child," he said, as he drew a two-dollar note from his pocket and handed it to her. It was the last money he had, with the exception of some small silver change, or that he would have until he should be paid off at the end of the current week.

"What is this for?" Annie inquired, as she received the note.

"To get something clean to put on the child. She is clothed in rags foul enough to give her the plague. Burn them, Annie, and clothe her cleanly, though I fear that note is absurdly small for the purpose," he said, uneasily.

"Oh," said Annie, with a laugh, "this will do quite well. I can get a good calico frock and two changes of underclothing with this. Of course they won't be very fine, but they will be clean and decent."

She said nothing about shoes, or stockings, or hat, nor did Will Harcourt think of them. But Annie had already planned to supply these necessaries by breaking a five-dollar gold piece, which represented the whole of the poor sewing woman's savings for the proverbial "rainy day" that the poor and thrifty expect and try to provide for. Annie thought that the "rain" was now falling on the forlorn child, and that the money would, after all, go to its legitimate use.

"At the end of the week I shall be able to give more," added Harcourt.

"All right, Mr. William. And now you may bring the little girl in to me, or let me go to her, whichever you please," said the seamstress, cheerfully.

"Then, if you are willing, I will take you in to her. You can make her acquaintance and win her confidence, and then invite her into your room. Would not that be the best way of dealing with this poor baby?"

"Of course it would," Annie answered, with a laugh. "She would be less shy of me if I were to go to her first. And you said you did not know anything about children. Oh, Mr. William! I believe you know all about them. I believe you have been elder brother to a long line of baby girls and boys, and

young uncle to a numerous tribe of little nieces and nephews."

"Oh, no, Annie," said poor Will Harcourt, with a profound sigh, given to the memory of his brave brothers and fair sisters who had left the earth in the early bloom of youth. "But come, now," he said. "I will take you in to our little waif."

The seamstress arose to accompany him.

"I hope," he said, "that she will not be much trouble to you or hindrance to your work."

"Oh, no," Annie answered, cheerfully. "I do not think she need be. And, besides, Mr. William, what if she should? I have so very little to trouble me, or to interrupt my work, in comparison to the trials and hindrances of other women in my line of life, that when a real duty comes to me I ought to jump at it, so to speak."

The end of this little speech brought them into Harcourt's room.

They found the child standing at the back window, gazing out over the roofs of houses and stacks of chimneys, to the distant sea. She was, of course, still draped in the dreadful shawl which hung about her as before, like the sooty blanket of some small, old-fashioned chimney sweep.

"Oh! what an object! Poor child!" whispered Annie. "And how pretty," she added, as the child turned around and faced her.

"Little one," said Harcourt, "I have brought you a very kind, good friend, who will be a mother to you, until we can find your lady."

The waif looked and "took stock" of the woman, and then solemnly expressed her approval.

"Yes, I like her."

"She will get you some clean clothes to wear," added Harcourt.

"And let me have a bath first?" inquired the child.

"Yes, indeed!" Annie exclaimed, breaking into the conversation, "that will be the very first thing I will do for you, and right away, too."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am; thank you ever so much! I

like you ever so much, too. I think—yes, I am quite sure you are possessed of common sense."

Annie looked surprised, and then laughed merrily.

The child was rather disconcerted, and hastened to say, in explanation:

"Of course, I only meant that you knew I could not go back to Lady in this trim, and I could not put on clean clothes without taking a bath first after this," she added, taking up the end of her drapery with a grimace.

"Of course you couldn't," assented Harcourt.

"If I did, I don't know what Lady would think of me. Or even Ducky Darling."

"And now, my little girl, will you stay here with this good friend, Mrs. Moss, while I go uptown?" inquired the young man.

"Will you come back—faithful—and take me to Lady?"

"My dear child, I shall have to find out where your lady is first. But don't you be afraid. I know how to find her."

"She lives in Goblin Hall. But, of course, she may be on a visit, or she may be away hunting all about for me."

"Yes; I will inquire."

"Oh, now, will you really? this very, very day??"

"Indeed, I will, my dear. Indeed, I will, my dear, this very day. Now, good-by, until I see you again," he added, stooping and kissing her on the forehead.

"Hurry off, Mr. William; I will take care of the little girl," said Annie.

"Yes," said Harcourt to himself, as he left the house, "if I should be an hour late I should be 'docked' half a day. But that dear, good woman, she will lose her whole day's work, I fear. But, after all, she will like it," he added.

But Annie did not lose her whole day's work.

She led the child into her own room, prepared a warm bath in a large washtub, put her into it, gave her a sponge and a bit of soap, and said:

"Now, play about in that, like a little duck in a

pond, to your heart's content, while I go and throw this tangle of fever away," she said, as she left the child splashing in the water, took the tongs and picked up the shawl with them, carried it into Harcourt's room, and threw it out of the back window.

"I had no means of burning such a thing in my small stove. But I am afraid it will become the treasure-trove of some other ragpicker, and so fulfill its destiny of a pestilence breeder," she said, with a sigh, as she closed the window.

When she returned she found the child still luxuriating in the warm bath.

She rolled up her sleeves and knelt down by her side, rubbed the little creature down, admiring a form as beautiful as one of Raphael's cherubs, took her out of the tub, wiped her dry, and laid her between the fresh sheets of her—Annie's—white bed.

"Now that you are so sweet, and clean, and comfortable, I hope you will not mind staying here by yourself while I go out to buy some clothes to put on you. It is only a little way I shall have to go, and I will not be gone long," said Annie, as she smoothed the counterpane over the bed.

"Oh, no, thank you, ma'am, I shall not mind staying alone, for, you must know, I really am possessed of common sense," said the elf, with impressive gravity.

"I decidedly think that you are. But, I forgot, I shall have to get the measure for your shoes. Put out your foot."

The child obeyed. Annie got a bit of tape from her workbasket and took the length of the little foot. Then she put her room in order and went out to purchase, from the cheap store at the corner, a very plain and limited outfit for the child—namely, two changes of cheap, cotton underclothing, a small, flannel petticoat, a pink calico frock, a white apron, a straw hat, with one band of blue ribbon around it, a pair of leather shoes, and two pairs of white cotton stockings. This purchase took the whole of Har-

court's two-dollar note, and a dollar and sixty-five cents out of Annie's half-eagle.

When she got back to her room she found her charge sleeping deliciously in the white bed. The little face was flushed with healthful life, and partly shaded by the luxuriant tangles of the golden-brown hair.

"What a lovely possession a child is," smiled and sighed the childless widow. "How I wish she was mine!"

She gazed at the pretty picture, but forbore to disturb the sweet sleeper.

Then, remembering that she could not lose time in this way, she went to her sewing machine, pushed it silently to the furthest part of the room from the bed, so that its sound should not wake the child, sat down and went to work, and worked hard at it for three or four hours before the sleeper moved.

CHAPTER XXIII

A TRANSFORMATION

"I WONDER now what place this is, and what that thumper-bumpering is, too," were the words that greeted the seamstress at last, and informed her that her charge was awake.

She instantly arose and crossed the room.

"Don't you know, darling—don't you remember?" she inquired, bending over the child, who, flushed and smiling, pushed her tangled curls away from her dark eyes, and looked at her friend and said:

"Oh, yes! I do remember now. Oh, how good you are to me! And the gentleman, too. Has he come back?"

"Not yet, dear. It is not time for him to come yet. But you must not be afraid. Mr. William will be sure to keep his word and hunt up your friends," said Annie.

"Oh, I know he will! If I didn't believe in you and him, I should not be possessed of common sense," said the child.

"Now, my dear, will you get up and let me dress you? Or would you rather lie here a little longer?"

"Oh! thank you, ma'am, I would like to get up. But you needn't trouble about dressing me. I always dress myself."

"Oh, you do? That is quite right. Now, then, here is your suit of clothes from head to foot," said Annie, placing the pile on a chair beside the bed.

While the child was dressing, the woman made up the bed. Both processes were finished about the same time.

The imp looked very clean and nice in her bright pink frock, white apron, and stockings, and shining black shoes, and she was regarding herself with great satisfaction.

"Your clothes are not as good as the ragpicker stole from you, I reckon," said Annie, almost apologetically.

"Oh, but I like them better. They are so bright and pretty! And, then, I shan't be afraid to soil them. They can go in the washtub and be washed, you know. I always like to wear frocks that can go in the washtub and be washed, you know. Don't you? One can keep so clean then."

"Yes," Annie answered, half laughing, half wondering at the strange child before her.

It was the poor needlewoman's dinner hour, so she said:

"Now, my dear, amuse yourself any way you please —looking out of the window, or taking up and looking at anything you like in the room, while I get dinner for us two, won't you?"

"Look here," said the little girl, "I don't want to do that. I want to do something to help you. I do like to do something real useful, only people won't let me half the time."

"Why, what can you do, you solemn, responsible midget?" inquired the needlewoman.

"You are making fun; but I am in earnest, and I can do many things. I can piece crazy quilts, as they call them; but, oh, I tell you they are not crazy at all, but just the most sensible things in the whole world; for they use up every bit of the scraps without wasting a thread of any. Scraps that you couldn't use for anything else. Oh, I tell you what! the woman that first thought of that sort of a quilt was possessed of common sense."

"I quite agree with you, my dear, but I am not making a quilt, and have no quilt pieces," said Annie.

"Well, then, if you have got any buttons to sew on anything, or any strings to run in anything else, I can do that."

"Very well," said Annie, who was too wise a woman to discourage any child's desire to do useful work, however futile the attempt might prove to be—"Very well, you are an industrious little girl, I think, and I will give you something to do."

"All right," said the small sage.

"Wait a minute," added Annie, as she caught up her hat and left the room. She passed downstairs and out of the house to that convenient corner shop, where she invested one cent in the tiniest nickel-plated thimble she could find.

"You must have a little girl staying with you, Mrs. Moss," said the saleswoman of whom Annie had bought the clothing that morning, and who, by the way, was a tenant in the same house with the seamstress.

"Yes, I have."

"A relation?"

"No; only a visitor. I am taking care of her a few days. Good-morning—though it is noon now."

When Annie re-entered her room she tried the thimble on the child's finger, and found it fit. Then she took up a calico sack, from a pile that she was at work upon—just such a sack as the cheap stores sell for twenty cents apiece.

"Here," she said, "the buttonholes are worked, you see, and I have marked for the buttons. Now you

may try to sew them on. Here is the card of buttons. Now let us see what you can do."

The child sat down on a little cricket and went solemnly to work.

Annie began to prepare their frugal midday meal of coffee, bread, butter and stewed apples. By the time it was on the table the child got up and said:

"I have sewed all the buttons—six of 'em—on this sack. Will you look and see if you like 'em, ma'am?"

Annie took the garment the child held out.

"It is very well done," she said, after examining the work; and she thought: "It is better done than I could afford to do it at five cents a sack. Customers complain that our buttons drop off, but if they knew how little we get for our work!"

"Hera showed me how to sew buttons on. I used to help her, too. I used to sew her strings together for her rag carpet. That is another sensible thing. Rag carpets use up all the rags and strings, you know."

"Yes," said Annie. "Now come and sit up to the table."

The child obeyed and seated herself opposite to her hostess.

"You are not used to this sort of a poor dinner," said the latter.

"Oh, I think it is just a lovely dinner! I am so fond of stewed apples, especially with plenty of sugar in them," said the little guest, very sincerely.

"You shall certainly have as much sugar as you like on your apples," replied Annie.

"Thank you, ma'am. How good you are to me!" said the child, as she received from her hostess a liberal supply of bread, butter and stewed apples, flanked by the sugar bowl, from which she was told to help herself to as much as she wished. "This is cozy and comfortable, isn't it?"

"Very."

When dinner was over and the dishes washed, and the room set in order, Annie went and brought from

Harcourt's apartment a bundle of old illustrated papers, which she offered to the child, saying:

"You can get some amusement out of these while I go on with my work, can't you?"

"Of course I could, but I don't want to. I would rather sew the buttons on the sacks. Now, you just look at that one and see how well I did it. I didn't draw the threads too tight because that would pucker the places, but I did sew them on strong, and fasten my ends tight."

"You did the work very well, indeed, my dear."

"Hera showed me how, and she took pains to teach me, and I took pains to learn."

"Who is Hera, dear?"

"Ducky Darling's mother."

"Oh!" said Annie, with a smile.

But the shrewd child understood at a glance that she had not been sufficiently explicit, so she added:

"Hera is Lady's poultry woman, and takes care of the chickens, and ducks, and the geese, and turkeys, and Ducky Darling is her little girl, and my little playmate. Dear Ducky Darling! You would love her so much if you knew her. She is so sweet. Now give me some more sacks and buttons, and I will go to work," said the small old lady, with an air of confidence and responsibility.

Annie gave her the materials, and then sat down to her machine and began to ply it.

The noise, as well as the occupation, forbade all conversation, and the woman and child worked on in silence for three or four hours, until Annie had finished the job of making the two dozen sacks upon which she was engaged.

Then she stopped her machine, covered it, gathered up her pile of sacks, and drew her chair near the stool of the child. Here she began to draw out the basting threads, and fasten loose ends, and put on all those little finishing touches that must be done by hand.

And while she did this she began to question her little guest, with so much tact as well as tenderness

that in the course of an hour or a little more time she drew from the confiding child as much of the story of her short life as that child understood and remembered.

When it grew too dark to work any longer, Annie folded up the sacks, which were by that time completely finished, and said:

"Now you stay here while I go and take these things to the store at the corner. You see, I work for that same store where I bought your clothes."

"Oh, do you? I'm real glad it is so near. And I will help you all I can. Say! I have been some little tiny bit of use, haven't I?"

"Indeed, you have, my dear," Annie answered, as she left the room.

The child, pleased at this warm acknowledgment of her services, looked around the room to see what more she could do to help her friend.

She saw threads and fluff scattered about the carpet, and she stooped down and gathered them up and put them in the stove.

Then she looked around again for "new worlds" of usefulness "to conquer," and she saw Annie's workbasket on the table in some disorder.

She took it and sat down with it on her lap and began to wind up the spools of cotton, roll up the rounds of tape, and so on.

While she was still intent on this little labor of love her friend re-entered the room, and seeing how she was engaged, said:

"Why, you little Busy Bee, what are you doing now?"

"Settling up your workbasket, ma'am, for it wanted it badly. And now I have finished it. But my name is not Busy Bee; it is Owlet," solemnly replied the child, as she replaced the basket on the table.

"I know—you told me so; Owlet and also Catherine. Now which would you rather I should call you?"

"Owlet."

"Well, then, Miss Owlet——"

"No," interrupted the elf. "Not 'Miss.' Whoever

heard of 'Miss' Owlet? Plain Owlet. Tom used to call me Miss Catherine; but that was something else. Tom was the little colored gentleman who waited on us when we lived in the city, in the lovely rooms with Lady."

"All right, then, Miss Catherine——"

"No—Owlet."

"Well, then, Owlet—I think we will get tea. And by that time, Mr. William will be home," said the seamstress, as she lighted her kerosene lamp, stood it on the mantelpiece, took her kettle and went to the water spigot to fill it.

When she had done this and was returning along the passage she met Harcourt at the top of the stairs, with a small paper bag in his hands.

"Oh, Mr. William," she said, "I want you, if you please, to come and take tea with us."

"'Us,' Annie? 'Us' has a very pleasant sound. Yes, I will, thank you. And here are some cutlets I bought to cook for the child. Will you take them to add to our tea?" he asked, putting the paper bag in her hand.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. William; this will come in very well," she said.

"How is the little one?"

"Oh, bless you! splendid! I have got all her little story from her, as well as a smart child of her age could give it."

"Indeed! What——"

"Now, wait! The story is too long to be told here at the top of the stairs with the tea kettle in my hand. Wait until after we have had our tea and I have put the child to bed; then I will tell you all about it. Her pet name is Owlet. She likes to be called by it. That is all you need to know just yet."

"Quite right, Annie. I will go into my room and brush myself up a little, and then join you and the child," he said, as he passed into his own apartment.

"Mr. William has come, dear. He has just gone to his room to wash and change his clothes, and then

he will come and take tea with us," said Annie, as she re-entered her own room.

"Oh, has he? And did he ask about Lady?" eagerly demanded Owlet.

"Of course he did. Didn't he promise that he would?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, then he did; you may be quite sure; and he will tell you all about it when he comes in. And now, what are you trying to do, little Goody Two Shoes?" demanded the seamstress, seeing that the child had taken a white cloth from the cupboard and was pushing it over the top of the table, which her chin just reached.

"I don't know what you mean by Goody Two Shoes, but I am going to set the table for tea. I can do it as well as anybody. Now, don't stop me. See!" she said, as she pushed the linen as far over the board as she could make it go, and then ran around and deftly pulled it straight and even.

"I see you can do it nicely. Go on, then, little Bopeep," said Annie, with a smile of approval, as she began to cook the cutlets, furtively watching the child with some uneasiness for the safety of her crockery.

She soon saw that she had no reason to fear, for Owlet was so excessively and even ludicrously careful in handling cups and saucers, etc., that she finished her task without the slightest accident.

By the time the tea was ready Harcourt rapped at the door.

Owlet flew to open it before Annie could say "Come in."

"Oh, have you found Lady?" she eagerly demanded.

Harcourt entered, sat down, took the child on his knees and answered:

"I have sent a telegram to that Mr. Merritt you mentioned. Do you know what a telegram is?"

Owlet looked at him in grave disapprobation of his impertinence in asking a question that implied her ignorance of such a well-known thing.

"Why, of course I do. Lady used to send lots of them. They go like a flash of lightning and come back like another flash of lightning. Puck used to take 'em when he went to the post office, and fetch 'em back when he came home. Oh, I know."

"I think 'what you do not know is not worth knowing,' as the saying is," observed Annie, with a laugh.

"Did you get an answer? Oh, tell me quick!" said Owlet.

"No answer yet; but I am expecting one."

"Now come and sit down to tea, both of you," Annie directed, as she placed chairs at the table.

"I know, as soon as ever Mr. Merritt gets the message, he will hurry right off and tell Lady, and she will come right away and fetch me home," Owlet declared, as her friend lifted her up and seated her beside himself at the board.

"I think it very likely," he replied, as he helped the child to a cutlet, while their hostess was pouring out their tea.

Soon after they had finished the evening meal Owlet's eyes began to wink and her head to nod.

Harcourt noticed the symptoms of sleepiness, and so he got up and said:

"I will bid you good-night," and stooped and kissed her.

"Good-night, sir. And, oh, if Lady comes for me after I have gone to sleep, will you please wake me up?"

"Certainly, if she should come."

"You have been very good to me, sir. Lady will thank you, oh, ever so much. And so will Ducky Darling, in her heart, for she don't know how to talk much, poor little thing."

When Harcourt had left the room the self-reliant child insisted on undressing herself, and was soon in bed and asleep.

Then Annie tidied up her room and went and knocked at Harcourt's door.

He came out and followed her to her own room.

They took seats at the front window.

"You must have some inkling of the little girl's history yourself, Mr. William," Annie began.

"Why do you think so?"

"You knew where to send a telegram."

"Yes, I knew that much, for the child chanced to mention some names of persons and places once familiar to me. Acting on that, I telegraphed Lawyer Merritt. I have had no answer from him yet. If I do not get one to-night, I shall telegraph Dr. Shaw in the morning."

"Who is Dr. Shaw?"

"Rector of Goeberlin parish, in which Goblin Hall is situated. And Goblin Hall, as the child told you, is her 'Lady's house,' where that lady lives a part of every year."

"Oh, yes. I see."

"Now, pray, tell me all that you have learned from the child of herself."

Annie then told the story as Owlet told her, in answer to leading questions. It need not be repeated her, even in epitome.

"So this little foundling of ours is the orphan of a poor widow who died in an apartment house in Washington, and the adopted daughter of the mistress of Goblin Hall, from which she was abducted. This is the gist of the whole story," said Harcourt.

"Yes; but why should she have been stolen from her benefactress? Who could have had any interest in the abduction of an orphan child living on charity?" Annie questioned.

"No one but the very man who carried her off. He alone was interested," Harcourt answered, grimly.

"But why should be, whoever he was, have been interested in taking off a destitute orphan adopted by a benevolent lady?"

Harcourt paused for a moment to reflect before answering. He had "read between the lines" of the story. He knew more of it than Annie had heard, or Owlet had understood, yet he could not tell his own or Roma's terrible story even to this good woman, nor could he give her any distinct or satisfactory

answer to her question without at least alluding to that "Deed Without a Name." So he answered, vaguely:

"Some mercenary, selfish or blackmailing motive, no doubt."

Just at this moment a knock was heard at the door of Harcourt's room. He left Annie, and saying:

"That may be the telegram," went out into the passage to see.

Annie heard him in low-toned talk with some one there, who presently left him and went downstairs.

Then Harcourt returned, looking very much puzzled, and said:

"This is a telegram from Mr. Merritt. I will read it to you," he said; and he read:

"City Hall, Washington, D. C., May 1, 187—.

"To Mr. William Williams, 110 Drouse Street, New York: Miss Fronde cannot interfere in the case of the abducted child. Wait for a letter of explanation.

"Amos Merritt."

"This is strange, and passing strange, Annie, is it not?" inquired the young man.

"It is indeed. I do not understand it in the least," sighed the seamstress.

"We must wait for the letter of explanation, it seems. That will clear up the case, I hope," concluded Harcourt.

At that moment there was another knock at Harcourt's door.

"I wonder what that is. It can't be another telegram," he said, with a slight smile, as he again got up and went out in the passage.

But it was another telegram, for in a few moments Harcourt returned to the seamstress' room with a face so white and a frame so shaken that she started up in a fright, and hurriedly exclaimed:

"For the Lord's sake, Mr. William, what is the

matter? What has happened? Have you received bad news?"

"Yes, Annie, very bad news. The very worst that could have come to me. I have received this telegram, summoning me immediately to my mother's sick bed. Ah! her deathbed, I have every reason to fear," said the young man.

But he did not read this telegram to her, as he had read the first because this one was written and directed as follows to the address he had left with the Wynthrops:

"Lone Lodge, Logwood, Md., May 1, 187—.

"To Mr. William Harcourt, care of Mr. William Williams, 110 Drouse Street, New York City: Come without delay. Your mother is very ill.

"Margaret Wynthrop."

No, he could not read that telegram to Annie.

"Oh, Mr. William, I am so very sorry. When shall you start?" she inquired, full of interest and sympathy.

"The last train for to-night would be gone before I could reach Jersey City. By the first train to-morrow I must leave."

"And the child, Mr. William? You will leave her with me, I hope. I will take good care of her."

"No, dear soul. I must take her with me."

"But, Mr. William, she would embarrass you, going on such a journey."

"I might have an opportunity of restoring her to her friends. In any case, dear heart, I feel a certain responsibility connected with that child which I cannot explain or even understand. I must take her with me and watch for an opportunity of restoring her to her friends."

"And about that letter, Mr. William?"

"If one should come, forward it to me."

"Yes, but please write out the address in full, for I am the worst hand in the world to remember names and places."

Harcourt took a lead pencil from his pocket, found a piece of paper in his table drawer, and wrote the following address: Mr. W. Williams, care of Mr. W. Harcourt, Logwood, Alleghany County, Maryland.

"Now, Annie," he said, as he gave her the slip of paper, "I will not keep you up any longer. Good-night! God bless you!"

He went into his own room, but did not light his lamp or retire to bed. He dropped into his chair, buried his face in his hands, and murmured:

"It has come! It has come! The awful crisis of my life has come at last!"

CHAPTER XXIV

HE GOES TO HIS DOOM

Harcourt did not go to bed that night. He sat by the back window, with his head bowed upon his hands, or he rose and walked up and down the floor of his room.

Until midnight the sound of his neighbor's sewing machine kept him company. Then it ceased. He threw himself for the last time in his chair, and sat with his elbow on the window sill, his forehead on his fingers, trying to nerve his soul for the ordeal in store for him.

When the earliest streaks of dawn appeared in the east he got up, bathed his face, and prepared to set out for Adler's rooms.

Harcourt was without a dollar, and it was necessary to borrow money to pay his way to Virginia.

As he went into the hall he heard Annie stirring about in her apartment.

He went and rapped at her door.

She quickly opened it, saying:

"Good-morning, Mr. William. I knew it was you. I heard you come out of your own rooom."

"Yes, Annie; I must go to see Adler before starting

on my journey. I just stopped to ask you if you would be so good as to prepare the child to accompany me. You can tell her that I am going to take her to Lady."

"Yes, Mr. William; but suppose Lady won't have her?"

"I cannot suppose anything of the sort in the case of this lady and child; but even in the improbable event you suggest I should be able to place the little one in good hands," said Harcourt, thinking of the benevolent and prosperous Wynthrops, as he turned to go.

"Mr. William!" said Annie, calling him back.

"Well, Annie?"

"You'll have no call to get anything or to worry over the fire, just as you are going on a long journey. I will have breakfast ready by the time you come back from Adler's."

"Oh, Annie!" he said, with a deprecating sigh, "how you do invite me to impose on you."

"Now, Mr. William, you know I'm a lone widow, growing old, without even an 'only son of his mother' to comfort me, unless it's you, and I feel like a mother to you."

"Since ever I have known you, Annie, you have been like—a dear, elder sister; but lately you have done too much for me."

"No! no! Mr. William. And as for this, why, it's nothing. Besides, you wouldn't have time to go to Adler's and come back and cook your breakfast and catch your train."

"No, indeed, I should not, Annie; so now I must thank you and hurry away."

He ran downstairs, out of the house, and down the street to the avenue, where he hailed a car and jumped on board.

Ten minutes' ride brought him to the corner of the street on which Adler lived.

He jumped off the car and ran up the sidewalk until he reached his friend's home.

It was still so early that the family had just risen. The wife was getting breakfast ready.

"You are our morning star, Mr. William. You always shine before sunrise," said Mrs. Adler, laughing at her own fancy, as she wiped her fingers and shook hands with him; but the next instant she saw his woe-begone face, and hastened to exclaim:

"Something has happened to you, Mr. William! What is it? Can Adler or I do anything for you?"

"You are right, my friend. I have had very bad news. My mother is ill, perhaps dying. I am called to her bedside," Harcourt replied.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said the sympathetic woman.

"Adler, can I speak to you a moment?" he inquired of the man.

"Certainly, Mr. William. Come, and we will take a walk on the pavement while the mother is getting breakfast," said the man, leading the way out.

As they paced up and down before the house Harcourt told his friend of his trouble, and ended by saying:

"This evening we shall all be paid off our semi-monthly wages, but as I shall not be at work to-day the contractor will only owe me for eleven days' work. That will be sixteen dollars and fifty cents. Now, Adler, if you can conveniently advance me that money I will give you an order to receive my wages, due to-night, and I shall be more than grateful to you for a very great accommodation. It is to pay the expenses of my journey south, for I have not a dollar. Nothing but the extreme illness of my mother would induce me to——"

"Now, Mr. William, not another word, or you'll hurt my feelings!" exclaimed Adler, interrupting the speaker. "I owe you every cent I have in the world. I owe you life itself. Ever since that night when you plucked me out of the very jaws of death and hell I have had good luck. I have had steady work, and never lost a day, or a half day. Nor has the wife, nor any of the kids, had an hour of illness. That was the turning point of my luck, Mr. William, and it was you,

under Providence, that turned it. I have lived well and saved up forty-seven dollars, and every single dollar of it is heartily at your service," he added cordially, catching and clasping the hand of his friend.

"Thank you! thank you!" warmly exclaimed Harcourt. "Thank you! But the amount that may be covered by the wages due me will be amply sufficient for my necessities. Nor would it be honest in me to borrow more, for heaven only knows whether I should ever be able to repay you."

"Oh, hush! hush! You hurt my feelings! You do, indeed! Come in, now, and I will get the ammunition for the battle of life," said Adler.

They had been walking back toward the house, and had now reached the door.

They entered the room where the wife had the breakfast ready.

"Your husband will tell you all about it, Mrs. Adler," said Harcourt in answer to her anxious, questioning looks.

Adler went into an inner room, but soon returned with a sealed envelope, which he silently put in the hand of his friend.

Harcourt pressed his hand in mute thanks, and then —declining their hospitable invitation to join their morning meal, on the plea that he had to hasten back to his lodgings with all speed, to pack his valise and catch his train—took leave of the kind family, ran to the corner of the street, boarded a passing car, and rode home.

He found breakfast waiting on Annie's stove, ready to be put on the table, and little Owlet in the seventh heaven of delight at the prospect of being taken immediately home to Lady by Mr. William.

Harcourt spent but little time over his repast and then went to his room to pack his bag.

Looking around, and remembering that he should never return to that room, and that its simple furniture might be worth something to his kind neighbor, he called her.

She came to him promptly.

He could not find it in his heart to sadden her by telling her he should never come back again, so, when, after waiting a minute for him to tell her why he had called her, she inquired:

"What is it, Mr. William? What can I do for you?"

He answered:

"You know, Annie, that our landlord's prudent agent always makes us pay the month's rent in advance."

"Yes, Mr. William; and I think it is just as well, for it's off our minds then, you know."

"Yes. Well, I have paid my month's rent in advance, as usual. I will leave you the receipt for the rent, Annie. There are three weeks yet to run. If I should not return at the end of that time you may give up my room, Annie, and take possession of my furniture. I give it all to you. In the meantime, dear soul, use this room and all there is in it as if it were your own. The weather will soon be warm, and from my room here you will get the sea breeze."

"Oh, Mr. William, you make my heart ache! Why do you talk so? You are not going to die! You are young and healthy! You will come back all right!" said Annie, with her eyes swimming in tears.

"Annie," he said, forcing a smile, "there are other changes besides death, you know."

"That is true," she murmured. "You might come into a fortune, or you might get married, or you might do both. But you will write and tell me?"

"Oh, yes, I will write and tell you; but I want you to know now that after I am gone you are to use this room and furniture as your own to the end of the month, and then, if I do not return, take possession of the furniture," concluded Harcourt, feeling a secret satisfaction in the knowledge that, whatever should happen to him in the near future, this good woman and sympathetic friend would never know the tragedy of his life—would never recognize in William Harcourt, the convict, William Williams, the young workman.

"If anything prevents your coming back, Mr. William, I hope it will be a wife and a fortune," said Annie as she left the room.

Harcourt locked his valise, took a last look around his apartment, and followed her.

When he re-entered Annie's room he found Owlet dressed for her journey.

Poor Annie had invested another dollar of her scanty savings for the child's benefit.

She knew that it would not be proper to start the child on a railway journey with a gentleman—and Annie had never been misled into any mistake as to "Mr. William's" real social position—in a pink calico frock and a white apron, and so she extinguished Owlet's fiery plumage under a little brown coat, more suitable to a little bird of wisdom, and for which she had paid sixty cents at that convenient corner store for which she worked. She put a brown ribbon of the same shade of the coat on the little straw hat, in place of the blue band, put a pair of ten-cent brown gloves on the tiny hands, and a five-cent handkerchief in the little pocket, with—which was an injudicious put—a penny roll of peppermint lozenges. Last of all, she folded up a paper of sandwiches for luncheon, and gave them to Owlet, charging her to hand them over to Mr. William when they should have taken their seats in the car.

"And now you are all equipped for your travels, little mite, and may the Lord have you in his care," said Annie, just as Harcourt entered the room, valise in hand.

He did not notice Owlet's traveling dress, much less compute its cost, or ask himself where the cash had come from that paid for it. He was as ignorant of all such knowledge as the child was. And Owlet herself must have been surprised had she suddenly discovered how little of common sense was possessed either by herself or her protector on this subject. Childlike, she took all this for granted. Harcourt's mind was burdened by heavier matters.

He bade good-by to Annie with emotion that she

could not understand. She did not know, as he did, that this was probably, almost certainly, their final parting.

And in this he had still only the one poor consolation—that when she should read in the newspapers of the conscience-stricken criminal who had given himself up to justice she would never think of connecting him with her sometime neighbor.

After this sad leave taking Harcourt led his little protégée out of the house and to the foot of Cortlandt Street, which was not far off. They boarded the ferry-boat as it was about to start.

"Do you remember ever having crossed this water before?" inquired Harcourt as the boat steamed away from the pier.

"No," Owlet answered.

"Yet you must have crossed this water when you came to this city."

"Must I?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, I must have crossed it while I was dead. I went dead several times while—while I was with him."

"Him? Who?"

"The man who took me away from Lady and Ducky Darling."

"Who was that man, my dear?"

"Oh, I don't know; but Lady wouldn't let him come in, and he wouldn't go away, and Pompous Pirate set the dog on him—Tiger, you know."

Harcourt knew perfectly well; and if he ever had had a doubt as to the identity of the child's abductor that doubt was set at rest now. He also understood what Owlet meant by going dead, and by what means the child stealer had managed to quiet her at intervals during their journey.

When the boat reached Jersey City, Harcourt, leading the child with one hand and his valise in the other, hurried on with the throng to the depot. When he reached the ticket office and took out and opened Adler's sealed envelope, he found, not the sixteen dol-

lars and fifty cents he had asked for, but thirty dollars, in three notes of ten each.

"More than half of his six months' savings," he said to himself. "Ah, me! the more I see of Adler the worse I think of myself. But his money must not be used—no, indeed, it must not. I must return it as soon as I get to Washington, and trust to Providence for future supplies."

He took tickets for himself and the child and hurried to the train. In two more minutes they were seated side by side in the common car, Harcourt next the window, lest Owlet should endanger her safety by putting her head out of it.

CHAPTER XXV

CHARLES CUTTS AGAIN

The car was not more than half full, but just as it started Harcourt heard a man come into the seat behind them, drop down in his place, and deposit a heavy bag beside him; and next he felt a hand laid familiarly on his shoulder.

He turned his head, and was face to face with Charles Cutts, the Baltimore broker, who was so fatally mixed up with the tragic drama of his life.

"How do you do? How do you do?" exclaimed the broker pleasantly, offering his fat hand. "Every time I see you, do you know, I am reminded of that night of Yelverton's death on the Isle of Storms."

"I need never to be reminded of it," said poor Harcourt with a profound sigh.

He was not so cautious and reticent now as he had been in his previous encounter with Cutts. The time of his confession was drawing too near to make it necessary that he should be so. If Cutts—who certainly knew more of the manner of Yelverton's death than any other man, except Harcourt himself—should feel inclined to denounce him, why, let Cutts do it—

if he would only wait a few days or hours, until Dorothy Harcourt should be at rest.

"Ah! you don't require to be reminded of it, don't you? Brooding over it all the time, eh? That's morbid. Take my advice, don't you do it. It is hurting your health. You are looking very badly, my young friend. Don't brood over what can't be altered now," said Cutts, patting him on the shoulder.

"I cannot help it. Since you know so much, you must also——" Harcourt replied.

"Yes, I do know so much!—much more than you dream of, my young friend—much more than I shall ever breathe to mortal ears, except your own, unless, indeed, it should be necessary to do so to vindicate some innocent accused person," said Cutts, dropping his voice to a low murmur, which precaution seemed unnecessary, since there was no one near enough to hear their conversation except the child, who did not understand what they were talking about.

"Do not be afraid, Mr. Cutts. No innocent man shall ever suffer for me, whether you ever open your lips on the subject or not," said poor Harcourt in a husky whisper, speaking now in recognition of the secret understanding between them.

But the broker stared at him blankly for a moment, and then said:

"I am not so sure of that. Look here, young man, what do you mean? You brood too much on this matter. How do I know what it will lead to? How do I know but what you will become insane, and go and accuse some poor devil or other, whom I shall have to vindicate by pointing out the real murderer? Take my advice, and don't brood, young fellow. It can do no good. 'What's done is done,' as Lady Macbeth, that strong-minded woman, wisely remarked to her very particularly feeble-minded lord and master. All the brooding in the present and future cannot alter the past. Say to yourself that you could not help what happened; and you really could not, you poor boy! Say to yourself it was kismet—and it was kismet, William Harcourt. Say that to yourself, and

then dismiss the matter at once and forever from your mind."

"As if I could!" sighed the young man.

"Why not? The case is closed and forgotten, except by you and me. The coroner's jury decided that Nathan Yelverton committed suicide, and all the world believed in the truth of that verdict—except you and me. We know, you and I, that the notorious sharper and blackleg did not die a suicide. But no one else on earth, except you and me, know that for the fact that it is, or even suspect it as a bare possibility, and I shall never divulge the secret, or breathe a hint of it to any living creature, except under the contingency I have mentioned."

"But why do you always speak of it to me? Why, whenever I happen to meet you anywhere, do you broach this painful subject?" inquired Harcourt in a distressed tone.

"Why? Because it is a sort of relief to talk of it to the only man that shares the secret, and—also—because, whenever I meet you, your looks trouble me. I see you suffer, and I fancy it might be some relief to you, also, to speak of this tragedy."

"It is not. It is exceedingly distressing to me. And now, Mr. Cutts, I must entreat you to drop it, after this, my ultimatum: That as you will only speak in vindication of some innocent person, I repeat that no innocent person shall be accused or suffer for me. Now that we perfectly understand each other, pray let us say no more about the horror," said Harcourt, turning his head away from his persecutor.

"What a child you are! And, by the way, I am not so perfectly sure that we do understand each other. I, in point of fact, I am pretty sure that we do not. But here we are at Newark, where I get off. Good-by," said the broker, as the train slowed into the station, and he took up his bag and left his seat to get off.

Harcourt rested his elbows on the window sill, dropped his head on his hands, and sank into troubled thought as the train started again.

Owlet was anxiously watching him. She had seen that the stranger had annoyed her friend, although she had not understood the drift of the conversation; and now, seeing him so bowed down in sorrow, she blamed the stranger, and sought to console Harcourt by the only formula that occurred to her mind:

"Don't you mind him," she said, sniffing with exquisite childish scorn. "He's not possessed of common sense!"

Harcourt patted her head, in recognition of her sympathy, and then relapsed into troubled reverie.

Owlet, perceiving that her companion was indisposed for conversation, settled herself in her seat, drew her roll of peppermint lozenges from her pocket, and occupied herself with them until the motion of the cars and the aroma of the peppermint sent her off into a sleep that lasted until they reached Wilmington.

Then she was awakened by the train stopping and the passengers leaving their seats for the railway restaurant.

"What shall I bring you for lunch, little girl?" inquired Harcourt, rousing himself.

"Nothing. Miss Annie gave me this to give to you," said the child, handing over the paper parcel of luncheon that had been intrusted to her. "It is our dinner," she added.

"Miss Annie has been like a sister to me, and a mother to you, has she not, little girl?" inquired Harcourt as he opened the parcel, spread a newspaper over his knees, and divided the sandwiches and apple pie between himself and his little companion.

"Ah! she has that," responded Owlet emphatically. "She is possessed of common sense, and I am going to ask Lady to invite her to come down and stay at Goblin Hall—that I am!"

"And do you think Lady will comply with your request?" inquired Harcourt.

"Will—what?"

"Will do it, when you ask her?"

"Why, of course she will, when I tell her what a

dear, good woman Miss Annie is. Lady is possessed of common sense, you bet. She has invited ever so many poor people to come to her house this summer. She has such a great big house, with ever so many rooms in it, and ever such a great big garden, with ever so much fruit and flowers in it. She's got everything she wants, and plenty of it—eggs and roses and banty chickens, and potatoes, and strawberries, and cows, and—and—things, you know—ever so many."

"But will Lady be willing to share all these things with a perfect stranger like Annie Moss?" inquired Harcourt, solely for the purpose of drawing the child out to talk of his loved and lost Roma.

But Owlet looked at him in solemn disapprobation. Why should he, or any one, doubt that Lady would do everything that was kind to everybody, her eyes seemed to ask. Then she answered:

"Of course she will! And, of course, Miss Annie will be no stranger after I have told Lady all about her; and Lady will be sure to invite her to come to Goblin Hall. You'll see. Oh! I think I will ask Lady to invite you to stay when you take me home to her. Wouldn't you like to stay?" inquired Owlet, with sudden inspiration.

"Lady is very good to everybody, then?" said the young man, evading the child's question.

"You bet! Why, didn't I tell you she was possessed of common sense? But I don't believe you listen to one word I say!" Owlet exclaimed in a tone of pique.

"Oh, yes, I do, indeed. To every word you speak about Lady."

"No, you don't. You never answered me when I asked you if you wouldn't like to stay at Lady's house when you take me home there."

"I beg your pardon, mistress. I will answer now. I should, very much, if I could, my dear."

"Well, you can, if you want to. I will tell Lady how good you have been to me, and she will have you stay, I know. And, oh! I think she will like you very much—I do, indeed. And, oh! I say, Mr. William!"

"What now, little girl?"

"I have just thought of it—oh! such a great thing!"

"What is it, dear?"

"I wish you and Lady would get married."

"Good heavens!" muttered the young man under his breath, and he turned quickly and looked out of the window to conceal the agitation of his face.

"Everybody who is possessed of common sense gets married, you know. And Lady is possessed of more common sense than anybody I ever saw in this world," continued Owlet, paying, in her own estimation, the highest possible tribute to the character of her benefactress. "But, you see, there's nobody down there for her to marry. There's only old Dr. Keech, who pulls people's teeth out and gives them nasty physic, and who I do not think is possessed of common sense. And there's old Mr. Shaw, who preaches such long sermons he almost makes me gape the top of my head off; and there's Lawyer Merritt, who is good for nothing, 'cept when he is Santa Claus. And, yes, there's old, old, old Grandfather Toomie, but he has got one wife already, and I don't think she'd like him to marry Lady. There, Mr. William! Them's all the men Lady has to choose from to marry, unless it's you, you know, and if you are possessed of common sense you will marry Lady."

"But, my dear, I am not possessed of common sense," said Harcourt in a serio-comic tone.

"There, now!" exclaimed Owlet, dropping a piece of pie she was conveying to her mouth. "I always thought so myself! I did, indeed! Though, mind you, I never said so. You said it, not me. I wouldn't like to, when you were so good to me; but it's too true!" she added, with a profound sigh.

"Yes, dear, it is too true," Harcourt confessed.

"Well, never mind. Maybe you was born so, and can't help it. But I tell you what you do. You marry Lady—Lady has got enough for both of you. She's got more than anybody I know. Marry Lady! You know very well that you ought to marry. Everybody ought to marry. I am going to be married myself."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! You bet!"

"May I ask the name of the happy man?" inquired Harcourt, with a smile.

"What happy man?"

"The lucky fellow you are going to marry."

"Oh, I don't know yet. But somebody, you may bet your life on that." And having expressed this excellent resolution, Owlet fell to eating her luncheon with a concentration of attention that precluded the possibility of further conversation for the present.

Harcourt's appetite had vanished. He could eat but little, and that little in a merely perfunctory manner, to keep his physical strength from utterly failing.

Passengers returned to their seats. New people got in. Some strangers took their places immediately behind Harcourt and his little companion, so that if either the man or the child had felt inclined to renew their discourse they could not have carried it on confidentially. But, in fact, neither wished to talk. Harcourt was buried in gloomy thought, and Owlet was heavy with drowsiness, like any other tired young animal after a hearty meal, so she curled herself up on her seat and shut her eyes.

The train soon started again, and rushed onward toward its southern destination.

The rapid motion, with the total absence of conversation, soon lulled the child to sleep.

The remainder of the journey passed without incident.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. MERRITT'S NEWS

It was growing late in the afternoon when the train ran into the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Depot at Washington.

Harcourt had still two hours to wait before he could get a train for West Virginia.

He determined to utilize this time by calling at the chambers of Mr. Amos Merritt to ascertain from him the present address of Roma Fronde, the probabilities of her receiving again the child who had been stolen from her, or if the lady's views were changed in regard to protecting the orphan, what had changed them.

He secured his tickets for Logwood, checked his valise, because he could not well carry it to the lawyer's office, and then took the hand of Owlet and led her from the building.

"Now, then, where are you going to carry me right away?" inquired that practical young woman, who was so largely endowed with common sense, and had so exalted an appreciation of its value.

"I am going to Mr. Merritt's office to inquire where Lady is at present. You remember Mr. Merritt?" inquired Harcourt as they walked on toward Louisiana Avenue, for it is needless to say Harcourt could not afford to hire a carriage, nor indeed was one needed for so short a distance.

"Well, I should smile! Haven't I been talking to you about him? He is one of them old gentlemen Lady will have to marry if you don't marry her."

"My dear child, do not talk that way," said Harcourt.

"Isn't Lady at Goblin Hall?"

"I am not sure that she is there now. She may be at the Isle of Storms, or she may be here in this very city."

"Oh, if I thought that!" joyfully exclaimed Owlet.

"Well, you see, it is better to inquire and make sure of where she is before we do anything else."

"Oh, yes. And Mr. Merritt will be certain to know all about Lady."

"Here we are. This is the place where the old lawyer hangs out."

Owlet looked all the way up the front of the house, and then turned great round eyes of inquiry to Harcourt's face.

"Oh, I don't mean himself, but his sign. There it is —'Amos Merritt, Attorney-at-Law.'"

"Oh, yes," said the child, as her companion led her into the house and up the stairs to the second floor, where Mr. Merritt's chambers were situated.

He opened a door on the right, that led into a large front room, where a young clerk sat writing at a desk. There was no one else in this outer office.

"Is Mr. Merritt in?" inquired Harcourt, going up to the desk.

"In his private office, yes, sir," the clerk replied.

"Will you take my card to him and say that I would be pleased to see him?"

"Yes, sir," the young man answered, and he took the bit of pasteboard and carried it into the back room.

In a few minutes he returned and said:

"Mr. Merritt will see you, sir."

"Now, my dear little girl, will you mind sitting here for a few minutes, while I go in first to speak to Mr. Merritt alone?" Harcourt inquired of the child.

"Well, n—no," said Owlet reluctantly, "not if you want me to do it. But you know Mr. Merritt is a very good friend of mine."

"Yes, I know, and you shall come in and speak to him presently."

"All right; go along. I will sit away off here by the window and look out on the street. I don't want to hear your secrets," said Owlet, with a ludicrous burlesque of childish dignity.

At a happier time Harcourt might have smiled at the little airs of the child, but now he only laid his hand kindly on her head, and then saying, "I will not be gone long," passed into the inner room.

Lawyer Merritt had risen to receive his unexpected visitor, and now stood facing the door, drawn up to his utmost height, with a very severe expression of countenance, and without a word of welcome on his lips.

Young Harcourt felt chilled and discouraged by

such a want of welcome, and hastened to say, deprecatingly:

"Mr. Merritt, I should, perhaps, apologize for this intrusion, but I have come here on business in which I think one of your fair clients is interested."

"Then take a seat, sir, and be good enough to let me know the precise nature of the business which has procured me the unlooked for honor of this call," said the lawyer frigidly.

"Thank you, I will not sit," said Harcourt, flushing deeply. "What I have to say may be said in a very few minutes."

The lawyer bowed, and stood waiting, with one hand resting upon his desk.

"You received a telegram yesterday announcing the discovery of a child lost in the streets of New York, and ascertained to have been stolen from the custody of her guardian, Miss Fronde, at Goblin Hall?"

"I did receive such a telegram, sir, and answered it. May I inquire what you have to do with the matter?"

"Certainly. It was I who found the child, and through the intervention of a good woman, full of tact and delicacy, learned as much of the little one's story as could be drawn from a creature of her tender years. I learned, in short, that the little Owlet was an orphan who had been adopted by Miss Fronde, between whom and herself there seemed to have been a strong bond of affection."

"Well, sir," said the lawyer in the same icy tone.

"It was I who wired you of the discovery of the lost child."

"Under a false name, then," said the lawyer scornfully.

"Not exactly, but under my own first name," said Harcourt patiently.

"Well, sir, I answered your telegram in sufficiently clear terms, I think."

"Yes; but—pray pardon me—your answer came in a few hours after my dispatch. Did you really have

time to communicate with Miss Fronde on the subject before answering my telegram?"

"No. I relied upon my own responsibility as her solicitor, with perfect knowledge of her relations to the adopted child, as well as of all her other business, and I considered my course in the matter conclusive."

"Yes," said the young man, still very forbearingly, "and that would have settled the question as to what should be done with the forsaken orphan, and I should myself have taken care of her, had not a message come summoning me immediately to the sick bed of my dear mother, to whom I am even now en route, only waiting for the train that will start in less than two hours for West Virginia."

"I am sorry to hear that Mrs. Harcourt is ill," said the lawyer, softened a little by the sorrow and patience of his young visitor.

"Thank you, sir. Under such circumstances I really did not know what to do with the forlorn child, except to bring her along with me."

"And you have really brought her here?" demanded the lawyer in surprise.

"I could not do otherwise. The little creature was and is, wild to return to her benefactress. I thought possibly, under the circumstances, that Miss Fronde might reconsider her resolution to have nothing further to do with the child, and reflect that the orphan's abduction was her great misfortune rather than her fault."

"You are mistaken. Miss Fronde formed no such determination. If you recall the terms of my telegram, you will find that I merely said that Miss Fronde could not interfere in the case of the child. And, in fact, sir, she had no right to do so."

"No right? May I be permitted to ask why she had no right?" Harcourt inquired.

The lawyer dismissed the question with a wave of his hand and said:

"I am by no means sure, however, that since the little one has been lost, and found again, Miss Fronde may not be willing, and even well pleased, to receive

her back again. She was certainly very fond of little Owlet. However, that can be easily ascertained, as Miss Fronde is now in Washington."

"In Washington!" echoed Harcourt, as his heart bounded and sank at the thought that his loved and lost Roma was now so close within his reach, yet so unapproachable—forever unapproachable by him.

"Yes. She arrived here by the late train from the West last night. She was on her way when I answered your telegram, which was the reason why I could not communicate with her. She is en route for the Isle of Storms, which she is turning into a sanitorium for destitute invalids and children. She leaves to-morrow by the early boat for the Isle. So, if you feel inclined to try the experiment, you had better take the child to her this evening. You will find her at her old quarters, the Wesleyan Flats, in the northwestern suburbs of the city."

Harcourt had not been able to put in a word until now.

"Ah!" he sighed, "I have not time. My train leaves at seven, and it is now after six. I dare not miss a train while my mother lies at the point of death. No —nor to tell the bitter truth—dare I present myself to Miss Fronde."

The lawyer suddenly looked grave and stern again.

Harcourt perceived his change of mood, and said, with a sigh:

"I feel and know in what a dark aspect I must appear to you, Mr. Merritt, but wait only for a few days longer and you will know and understand all."

"Mystery is humbug, sir," said the lawyer roughly.

"It is more than that, in some cases, Mr. Merritt—it is guilt, remorse and shame," said the young man, in a tone of such deep despair that the old lawyer was startled. "But let that pass for the moment," he added. "This child—does Miss Fronde know that she has been found?"

"No. I only saw her last night, when I met her by appointment, at the depot, and took her to the Wesleyan. I would not trouble her then with news that

might have broken her night's rest. For reasons that it is not necessary to go into now she thought Owlet was in proper hands, and was, in a measure, at ease on her account. If, however, I had told her that the child had been lost and found in the city of New York she would have been very much distressed, especially as she could not have then interfered; but since the child is here again, and without her agency, she may receive her; and I am inclined to think she will do so. I have not seen Miss Fronde to-day, but I have an engagement to dine with her at the Flats this evening at half-past seven."

"Then, Mr. Merritt, as it is impossible for me to approach Miss Fronde, and be the happy medium of restoring the lost one, will it be too much for me to ask of you to do this gracious service to the orphan and her benefactresss?" Harcourt pleaded.

"Of course I will take the child to Miss Fronde. Where is she?" inquired the lawyer, looking around as if he expected to find her perched upon some chair.

"In the front room. I will go and bring her in, if you will permit me."

"Certainly. Go, and bring her."

Harcourt passed into the front room, where he found the child yawning in a deep leather armchair, in which her little figure was nearly lost.

"Well, you have been a time! I have almost gaped the top of my head off!" said Owlet reproachfully, as soon as she saw him.

"I'm sorry. But come, my dear. Mr. Merritt wants to see you, and take you right away to your Lady," said Harcourt.

"Oh, where is she? Where is she?" exclaimed Owlet, jumping off the chair in great excitement.

"Not far off. She is back here in the city, and in that same house where you first met her. You will see her in time to take tea with her," he replied as he led the delighted child into the presence of the lawyer.

"Hello, Miss Catherine! Is that you? You have had adventures since I saw you last. You will have

to write your travels, I am thinking. Where did you come from last?" gayly demanded Mr. Merritt, holding out his hand to the child.

She rushed upon it, seized it, looked up into his face, and exclaimed:

"Oh! are you going to take me to Lady—right away—this very, very minute?"

"Just as soon as I can wash my face, change my coat and put on my hat," said Amos Merritt, smiling at the impetuosity of the child.

"Well, then, please—oh, please! be very, very quick! And I know you will be, for you always was possessed of common sense!" exclaimed the child, with her formula of highest praise.

"Oh, thank you! I feel as if I were invested with the Order of the Garter," said the lawyer as he left the office to retire into the little dressing-room where he kept his best coat, clean collars, combs and brushes, etc.

He spent but a few moments over his toilet, and came out dressed for dinner.

"Come, now; I am ready," he said.

"Good-by, dear little Owlet," said Harcourt, stooping to kiss the child.

"Oh!—but ain't you going with us to see Lady?" inquired the little one, with a look of surprise and disappointment.

"No, dear child, I cannot do so," sadly replied the young man.

"Oh! but indeed, indeed, you must! you must! you must!" she insisted.

"Listen to me, little one. My dear old mother is sick in bed. I did not tell you so before, because I did not wish to trouble you, but I tell you so now so that you may know why I must hurry away to see her," said Harcourt, looking down into the earnest face of the child, whose brown eyes were lifted to his, full of sympathy.

"Oh, I am so sorry—so very sorry! I hope she will get well soon, and then you can come to see Lady and me," she said.

"I should be very happy to do so, dear. Now you will let me go? Good-by, dear," he said, stooping again to kiss her, and saying to himself:

"This is another final parting. Even this child I shall never see after this day."

Mr. Merritt was drawing on his gloves, and kindliness getting the better of his sternness for a moment, he said:

"Oh, don't take leave of her here. Come along with us. Our course goes the same way as far as the avenue, where we take the up car, and you the down one."

"Yes; come as far with us as you can," pleaded Owlet, clinging to his hand.

"Willingly, my dear," said the young man.

The three left the room together, Harcourt leading the little girl.

In the outer office Mr. Merritt stopped a moment to speak to his clerk.

"I shall not return here again, Lloyd. Lock up at the usual hour."

Then they went downstairs and left the house.

On their way down Four and One-half Street to Pennsylvania Avenue, Owlet chattered to her friend:

"I do thank you ever so much for being so good to me. I shall be sure to tell Lady all about you, and she will thank you, too, oh! ever so much! And so will Ducky Darling, though she can't say much, poor little thing. She is so little, and so ignorant, you know. And, oh! I hope your dear mother will soon get well, and you will come to see me and Lady. And you will fetch her, too, won't you? I shall tell Lady to write and ask her to come with you," she said.

They were very near the avenue, and they saw an uptown car coming toward the crossing.

Mr. Merritt raised his stick and his voice to hail and stop it. Then he took a hurried leave of the young man, seized the child, and put her on the car while she was still saying to her friend:

"Oh! good-by! good-by! good-by! I am so sorry you are not going with us!"

He raised his hat and smiled as the car ran away with them.

Then he turned his steps in the opposite direction and walked hurriedly to the railway station, arriving there just in time to catch his train.

CHAPTER XXVII

ROMA AT WORK

After the abduction of Owlet and the departure of Mr. Merritt the life of the lady of Goblin Hall was very lonely.

Only one constant visitor cheered her solitude. That was her aged pastor, Dr. Shaw.

When Roma was inclined to grieve for her lost pet, and cherish gloomy forebodings for the child's future, Dr. Shaw would always reassure her.

One morning, when he was making a call, she said to him:

"It fills me with despair to think of my little Owlet in the power of that man—that man who deserted his young wife and child when the child was but three months old—that man who has no conscience and no affection, who uses the child only as a scourge to drive me into a position which I could not accept, even for that dear child's sake. I say it fills me with despair, Dr. Shaw."

"My dear Roma, as you cannot contest his claim to his own child, as you cannot accept the terms upon which he offers to restore her—as, in fact, you can do nothing in this case, you must leave all in the hands of Divine Providence. Hanson is an irreligious, unprincipled man; yet, as he has more money than he knows what to do with, he will take good care of his own little daughter. You may assure yourself of that."

In this manner the good minister would seek to raise her drooping spirits.

One glorious forenoon, early in May, as Roma was seated in her Quaker rocking-chair, on her front piazza, engaged in her "contemplative knitting work," with the little colored child, Ducky Darling, seated at her feet, nursing Owlet's bull pup, George Thomas, she heard the sound of wheels.

Looking up, she saw a gig rolling along the acacia drive toward the house. As it drew nearer she recognized the venerable figure of the aged minister seated within it, with another, of a young, grave, clerical-looking man, beside him.

Puck, who was hoeing a flower bed in front of the house, dropped the hoe and ran forward to take the horse's head, just as the minister drew up the gig before the door.

Roma also arose, and came down the steps to receive the visitors, while Ducky Darling, with George Thomas in her arms, waddled away, in fear of the stranger.

Dr. Shaw alighted, followed by his companion, and threw the reins to the negro.

"Mus' I take de hoss an' gig ayound to de stable, sah?" inquired Puck, touching his hat to the clergyman.

"Yes; of course," quickly struck in Roma, speaking for her old pastor before he could open his lips.

And the negro mounted the gig and drove off.

"Good-morning, my dear Roma," said Dr. Shaw, offering his hand.

"How do you do? I am very glad to see you," said the young lady, cordially taking the proffered hand in both of hers.

"Allow me to introduce to you my esteemed young friend, the Rev. Paul Stone. Mr. Stone, Miss Fronde."

The young clergyman bowed.

"I am very happy to know you, Mr. Stone," said Roma, cordially offering her hand, which he took and bowed over, saying:

"I am honored."

The hall door stood wide open on this lovely May morning. Roma turned with a smile, and with a wave of her hand mutely invited them to precede her into the house.

"Oh, no, thank you. Let us sit out here, if you have no objection; which, as we found you sitting here when we drove up, I presume you have not," said the old minister, with a deprecating smile.

"Of course not. It is my favorite seat in this season, always excepting the summer house in the garden," said Roma, with an answering smile.

Paul Stone drew chairs forward for Dr. Shaw and himself, and they seated themselves.

Roma resumed her own seat and her knitting work, for she knew that nothing made her friends feel more at ease than to see that they did not interrupt the mechanical work that could be carried on without interrupting conversation or withdrawing the least attention from themselves.

"Mr. Stone graduated last summer from the Theological College of Alexandria, Virginia. He was ordained only this last Easter. Our parish is his first charge," said Dr. Shaw, with a smiling glance from his hostess to his clerical brother.

Roma followed his glance, and noted the figure and appearance of the young stranger. He was about twenty-five years of age, tall, broad-shouldered, finely formed, with regular features, dark complexion, black eyes, black hair, and a cleanly shaven face. But his greatest charm was in the expresssion of his countenance—grave, sweet, intellectual, spiritual, suggesting pictures of the young St. John, the beloved disciple.

"I am very happy that you have come to our parish. I thank you very much for coming," said Roma softly.

"My gratitude is due to you, lady, for giving me the opportunity to work," he earnestly replied.

"My young brother is going to be of the greatest use to you in the organization of your Free School

for Colored People," said Dr. Shaw, "and other good works."

"I am very sure that he will," Miss Fronde replied, not formally and conventionally, but most cordially and emphatically.

Paul Stone flushed and bent his head, saying modestly:

"I shall spare no pains to do my very best."

Dr. Shaw then went into the subject of the free school to be established on the Goeberlin estate for the education of the colored people of that neighborhood.

"It is the first thing to be taken in hand," he said, "and one thing at a time is my maxim."

The three held counsel together on this subject, and settled a part of the plan.

There was no building on the plantation that was suitable, or that could be spared, so it was decided to erect one.

"And there is no need to engage a contractor for the simple building of a country schoolhouse. We will employ local stone masons and carpenters, and have a personal supervision over them," said Dr. Shaw, and he took his tablets and pencil from his pocket and drew a design, which he submitted to Roma and Paul Stone. Both approved, yet suggested some little changes, which Dr. Shaw accepted as improvements on his plan. Then the diagram was laid aside for future consideration and their attention was turned to the subject of teachers.

Both Dr. Shaw and Mr. Stone were in favor of engaging male teachers, for they argued, and with good reason, that, if besides children and young girls, there were to be young men in the school, they would require men to govern them.

But Roma was opposed to the plan, and was in favor of women, and here she was as firm as adamant. She would try women and moral suasion first, before resorting to men and corporal punishment—for that was what men's rule in such schools generally meant,

she thought. Moral suasion was so much holier an influence than bodily fear.

"My dear," said the old parson, with an odd smile, "'the days of the years of my pilgrimage on earth' are seventy-seven years and five months, and during this long experience I have learned that all women are not lambs, nor all men lions. I have known one or two mistresses of plantations so cruel and tyrannical that the lives of their slaves were hells upon earth; and, on the other hand, I have known one or two masters who ruled entirely through conscience and affection; and one or two other people of each sex who were utterly incapable of ruling in any manner."

"These were exceptions, and the exception proves the rule, it is said. I know that women have more patience with children than men have, and these young colored men and girls, whose docility you doubt, are, in their ignorance, no more than children. Oh, Dr. Shaw, don't you know that all the little children of our Lord are not under three feet tall? Some of them are over six. But there is another reason why I prefer to engage women for the school. There are so few fields of labor free to women, while there is such a vast area open to men."

No doubt the old minister had an overwhelming argument against this last "reason" in the fact that, as a rule, women were not required to work in any field of labor, but only in the lovely garden of home, cultivating the flowers of the nursery and the fruits of the dining-room, with a prospect of a harvest of domestic happiness, while the men worked for them in these outlying fields; but before he could utter his thought they were interrupted.

Pontius Pilate ambled up to the house on his fat white cob, dismounted, and brought the mail bag to his mistress, pulled his front hair by way of obeisance, and then remounted his horse and rode away to the stable.

Roma unlocked and emptied the bag.

There were several papers and magazines, but only

one letter. She offered the papers to her visitor, who gladly received and unfolded them. Then she took her letter. She recognized it at once—not by the handwriting—there was no handwriting—it was written by a typewriter, perhaps so that it might never be brought in evidence against its author, though Roma could not conjecture why that author thought it necessary to take such a precaution.

Her first impulse was to tear it up and throw it away unread, but anxiety to hear from her loved and lost little Owlet prevailed over her disgust, and she opened and read it.

It was a long, eloquent, impassioned appeal, which we will not inflict upon our readers. It ended in this wild sentence:

"The child is dying—breaking her heart for you! I am losing my reason—going mad for you! Oh, Roma Fronde! what man ever worked, dared and suffered for woman's love as I have done for yours? Send me a line; say that I may come to you and bring the child, and save us both from death, and me from hell!"

Roma read the letter and passed it over to Dr. Shaw.

He took it, read it, and said:

"The child is with her father; her condition, no doubt, exaggerated."

"And in any case, I cannot yield. Self-respect, truth, womanhood, must not be sacrificed, even for a beloved child. I must leave her to our Heavenly Father," said Roma, as she tore the letter to pieces and threw the fragments away.

Paul Stone, reading his newspaper, had paid no attention to the low-toned conversation between his two companions.

Presently Dr. Shaw said:

"Now, my dear, if you will be so good as to order my gig, I think we will go."

"No, you won't go! I sent the gig to the stable, not to have it brought out until night. You and Mr. Stone must really stay and spend the whole day, un-

less there is some insuperable objection to your doing so," said Roma.

"There is no such thing, my dear, but we really did not come with any such intention, for we did not know what your engagements might be."

"I have no engagements for the day—for any day, I might add."

"Then we shall be happy to stay. What do you say, young brother? Shall we spend the day with Miss Fronde, and go home by the light of the moon? —there is a moon to-night."

"With all my heart," said the young clergyman. Then, turning to their hostess, he bowed, smiled, and added: "I thank you, Miss Fronde."

"You favor me, sir," said Roma.

So they stayed and spent the day, and went home late in the evening.

From this day Roma Fronde's busy life began.

The site of the schoolhouse was chosen in a grove on the borders of the estate nearest the village of Goeberlin, and a number of workmen were employed to get the stone from the quarries and to lay the basement.

Roma, with her two advisers, Dr. Shaw and Mr. Stone, soon perfected the plan for the superstructure, and stone masons and carpenters were set to work. Local mechanics were also employed to make the desks and benches, pails, brooms, and so forth.

It was thought that the building might be completely finished and furnished by the first of August, but though the building could then be quite ready for occupancy, Roma knew the school could not be opened in the summer vacation time, or until, at earliest, the first of September. She advertised for competent teachers, who would be ready to enter upon their duties at that date, and from a host of applicants she selected one young and one middle-aged woman, both unmarried.

When these plans were all settled Roma decided to leave their execution in the hands of her two clerical friends and to go to Washington to begin her prepa-

rations for turning the Guyon Manor House, on the Isle of Storms, into a free sanitorium for destitute invalids and children. There was not so much to do in that direction, but it needed to be done at once.

There was another reason, also, why Roma wished to get away from Goblin Hall as soon as possible.

Paul Stone, in his character of adviser and assistant in the work of founding the free colored school, had been an almost daily visitor at the hall. He had been attracted and fascinated by the gracious and majestic beauty of the person and character of Roma Fronde. He loved, adored and worshiped her. He was completely infatuated with her, and though he never breathed the passion that was consuming him, he constantly betrayed himself.

Roma's kind heart was touched by his dumb devotion, but now she found it difficult to be as gentle and friendly in her manner to him as she wished to be, without encouraging hope, and perhaps precipitating a proposal from him, which she would be obliged to meet with a rejection—a rejection painful to herself and mortifying to him. She wished to avoid giving him this humiliation. The only way out of the difficulty that occurred to her mind was to leave the neighborhood as soon as possible.

So one morning, when Dr. Shaw called to see her, she said to him:

"I think I shall go to Washington early next week?"

"Indeed! Why so soon? Is this a sudden resolution, my dear?" inquired the surprised rector.

"Well, no. The work here is all well laid out, and the schoolhouse will be finished and furnished even before it is time to open the school. I can very well leave the neighborhood now, and the supervision of affairs here to you and Mr. Stone. I have very much to do in Washington and at the Isle of Storms before the first of August, when you and I must sail on our voyage to Europe."

"Yes, of course."

"I have to make arrangements to convert the old manor house on the Isle into a free sanitorium for

the sick poor. Certainly there is not much to be done. The house is large, and in good repair. I have only to send down a great many cots, with bedclothes in proportion, and provisions by the wholesale. This will not take long to do, for it is quite as easy to buy a hundred cots or twenty barrels of flour as to buy one."

"Yes, my dear, when we have the money, as you have."

"I meant to say," said Roma, with a slight flush, "that it takes no more time to purchase a large quantity than a small one."

"I know what you meant, my dear."

"So there is really not much to be done, though what there is should be done immediately. If the place is to be of any use this season it should be ready for occupancy by the first of June."

"Certainly. I see that."

"Therefore, I must go to Washington as soon as possible. As you and Mr. Stone have been my invaluable counselors and co-laborers in the work here, so will Lawyer Merritt and Dr. Washburn be my advisers and assistants in my work there. So that in the course of four or five weeks I hope to get the free sanitorium in good working order, with a resident physician, a competent matron, and a staff of skilful nurses and servants. Later you may safely leave the parish and the school in the able hands of Mr. Stone, and join me in Washington in time for our voyage. How do you feel about that voyage, dear Dr. Shaw?" Roma inquired, with interest.

"Like a schoolboy going on a holiday, my dear," the old minister exclaimed. "There are so many elements of pure pleasure in it. We leave no family ties behind to tear at our heartstrings, and we go to no strangers, but to dear, old, lifelong friends. It will be a glorious holiday, please the Lord!"

He had not come to stay this day, for he had other and pressing engagements in his parish. So he soon arose and bade Miss Fronde good-by.

Dr. Shaw's gig had scarcely disappeared when a peddler's cart, driving leisurely up the avenue, came

in sight. The peddler on the seat was no other than Hanson's disguised detective.

Puck, as was his custom, ran from his work on the lawn to take the horse's head as the peddler stepped down from his seat.

"I wish to see the lady of the house," said the stranger.

"Dat's her, den; dat's our youn' mist'ess a-sittin' on dat dere yockin-cha' on de po'ch," said Puck, as he tied the horse to a tree.

The man went up the steps, took off his hat, and said:

"Excuse me, ma'am; I have a fine assortment of fancy and useful goods in my cart. May I have the pleasure of showing them to you?"

Roma was invariably kind to "all sorts and conditions" of fellow creatures. In every man, woman and child who approached her she recognized a neighbor. No peddler, book agent, or even "lightning-rod man," was ever turned away empty handed. Each was trying to make an honest living, and must be encouraged, she said to herself and her friends. So to this peddler she said:

"Certainly. Perhaps I or my people would like to buy something." And she called Puck, and told him to bring Nace, Hera and the children, and to find Pontius Pilate and Ceres.

The young man ran off and summoned the whole household, who soon crowded on the lawn in front of the piazza.

Meanwhile, the peddler brought many paper boxes from his cart and laid them on the floor. One, however, he opened, and laid on a chair before Miss Fronde. This was filled with fine laces, fichus and pocket handkerchiefs, in smaller, separate boxes.

"Yes," said Miss Fronde, "these are certainly very pretty. I will take some of them. Now show my people something that will please them—in bright colors."

The peddler bowed, and opened the larger boxes on the floor, displaying gorgeous splendors in shawls,

skirts, neckties, head handkerchiefs, aprons, gown patterns and vest patterns, in red, yellow, blue, orange, green, purple, or all blended, a spectacle that almost took away the breath as well as dazzled the eyes of the delighted darkies.

'Now choose what you will as parting presents, for I shall be going away in a day or two," said Miss Fronde.

And the darkies thanked her in a tumultuous chorus of delight, and took her at her word—largely at her word—for they had boundless faith in their mistress' fabulous wealth.

Hera chose prints and ginghams of the most brilliant colors to make gowns and frocks for herself and children, besides shawls and handkerchiefs of rainbow hues. Pompous, Nace and Puck rivaled each other in the fiery flames of red and yellow of the bandannas and scarfs, neckties, gloves and vest patterns of their selection.

The children were decorated and delighted with imitation coral and gilt beads, and dressed dolls and gayly painted drums.

Only Ceres groaned disapproval of the whole proceeding. "It was all wanity an' wexation ob de speerits," she said. "It was de scalirt 'oman at Babylon. It was de beas' wiv seven horns. An' dey was all gwine doun inter de bottomless pit ob de outer darkness."

And when urged to buy something she picked out the darkest grays and browns and rustiest blacks she could find in shawls and skirts and gown patterns for her own lugubrious wearing.

Roma had a large bill to foot, but she paid it with delight, seeing how happy she had made her people, and believing how much she had helped the "poor" peddler.

The man's load was considerably lightened when he returned his half-emptied boxes to his cart, and, after thanking the lady for her custom, mounted his seat and drove off.

He had been peddling around the neighborhood for

about ten days, and had been making cautious inquiries about Goblin Hall and its mistress, or rather skilfully leading gossips to talk, and had learned as much as her neighbors knew of her life, and he had reported the same to his employer. But this was the first occasion on which he had visited Goblin Hall and enjoyed the opportunity of a personal interview with Miss Fronde. He had seen her under the most favorable circumstances, when her whole personality was irradiated with the delight of delighting.

"That lady," he said to himself, "is not pining after that child, or after anything else in this world. She is the very happiest lady, as well as the handsomest one, I ever saw in the whole course of my life. And so generous! Why, if I had been a real peddler, my fortune would have been made!"

And these very words the detective also wrote to his employer, filling the heart of the latter with gall, despair and bitterness.

On the next day, Sunday, Roma went to church, where the young assistant conducted the services and the old pastor preached the sermon.

After the benediction and the dispersion of the congregation Roma took an affectionate leave of both her clerical friends.

"But as it will be nearly three months before you sail for Europe, you will surely come down here once again to see your friends before you go?" said Paul Stone.

"I think I shall," said Roma gently.

"But will you not promise to do so?"

"I wish I might; but I shall have so much to do."

The young minister sighed profoundly. He did not mean to betray his sorrow and despair, but he could not help doing so.

"Don't be surprised, my dear, if you find us both at the depot to see you off to-morrow morning," said Dr. Shaw.

"Oh, do not break your rest so early. The train leaves at seven," said Roma.

"Never mind. Only don't be surprised," repeated the old rector as he handed her into her carriage.

Again she shook hands with both friends and then drove home.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ROMA IN WASHINGTON

Roma Fronde arose very early the next morning, to be ready to secure her train. She spent but little time over her breakfast and her leave-taking, and a little after five o'clock she entered her carriage, with Puck on the box, and her traveling trunk strapped behind, and started for Goeberlin station. After a delightful morning drive up and down the wooded hills that lay between the Hall and the village she reached the railway depot and went into the waiting-room, while Puck took her ticket, checked her baggage, and dispatched a telegram that she had written to Mr. Merritt to engage apartments for her at the Wesleyan and meet her at the Washington depot on the arrival of the latest train from the West.

In the waiting-room she found Dr. Shaw and Paul Stone.

"I told you we should be here to see you off," said the elder man when both arose to shake hands with her.

"You are so good to me always," said Roma, smiling.

"I am so glad that you have so fine a day for your journey, Miss Fronde," ventured the younger man.

"Thank you. It is a glorious day, is it not?" said the young lady, still beaming.

"Much too glorious to abandon the country for the city."

"Oh, but Washington is not like any other city in the world, I think. Washington, with its broad, shaded streets and avenues, its deeply shaded parks and squares, is perfectly beautiful in May and June, when

the trees are in fresh leaf and the flowers in fresh bloom—an ideal city," said Roma with enthusiasm.

"I remember it when it was mostly bog, swamp and scrubwood, and Pennsylvania Avenue was like a muddy country road, with a few straggling houses and shops built irregularly on each side," said the old minister.

"Well, then, a beautiful city has now been evolved from that 'wilderness,' and literally been made to 'bloom and blossom as the rose,'" Roma replied.

At this moment Puck entered the waiting-room, came up to his mistress, and handed her her ticket and check.

"Be sure to take care of the carrier pigeons, Puck," she said.

"'Deed will I, youn' mist'ess, same as if dem birds was my own chillun," fervently replied the young negro.

"And poor little Owlet's dog, Puck—don't let any harm come to him."

"Needn' tell me dat, youn' mist'ess. Dat doag allers sleeps wid de chillun. Ducky Darlin' dotes on dat doag; it's de only comfo't she takes ebber since de po' little lady was stole 'way; fo' de po' little lady's sake, I fink it is, ca'se she won't answer to no udder name but Ducky Darlin', ca'se de little lady allers called her dat; so we-dem has fell into de way ob it, too. Oh, yes, youn' mist'ess, dat doag gwine be well tuk care ob, an' likewise dem birds. Dere's de train comin', youn' mist'ess," added the negro as the roar of the approaching engine was heard.

"Well, good-by, Puck. Don't drive the horses fast going back. They have had a hard drive here. And if you should want to write to me, Dr. Shaw has kindly promised to be your penman. Before the end of the year I hope you will be able to read and write yourself."

"Thank 'e, youn' mist'ess. All yight, youn' mistess. I'll 'member all yer say," said the negro.

Roma arose and took the proffered arm of Dr. Shaw

to go out upon the platform, Mr. Stone following, and Puck bringing up the rear.

"I believe this is the first journey you have ever taken alone, my dear," said Dr. Shaw.

"Oh, no—not by many. When my dear father was with General Lee I used always to go back and forth between school and home alone. Of late years, it is true, I have had companions, until now; but it is nothing to take this journey alone. It will be a pleasant summer day's ride, through a very beautiful country."

The train rushed, roaring and rattling, up to the platform and stopped. Roma happened to be the only passenger to get on at that station. Dr. Shaw put her in her seat, and he and Paul Stone shook hands with her. Puck pulled off his hat, bowed and grinned. The railway porter rattled her trunk on the baggage car. The engine gave a shrill whistle, and shot off, dragging the train behind it.

A long, pleasant summer day's ride this really proved to Roma Fronde, who was strong and healthy enough to enjoy the rapid motion and the shifting scenes for many hours without the least fatigue or satiety.

After sixteen hours' run the train reached Washington, at about eleven o'clock.

Roma found Mr. Merritt waiting for her at the depot.

"Delighted to see you looking so well, my dear. I have a carriage waiting, and your rooms at the Wesleyan Flats are engaged. Not your old rooms, because Mrs. Brown and myself thought the associations connected with them were, perhaps, too sad; but rooms on the first floor front. There is hardly anybody there at this season, so you may really have your choice of apartments, if you should not like those that have been made ready for you," said Mr. Merritt, after the first greetings were over and as he led her out on the sidewalk, where a hack was waiting to receive them.

"You were very kind to take so much trouble on

my account. I thank you very much," said Roma as he handed her into the carriage.

"Oh, now, don't hurt my feelings," said the lawyer with a laugh, as he paused at the carriage before following her. But tell me—how about your baggage?"

"Oh, I have only a trunk. I gave the check and address to an expressman on the train, and the trunk will be delivered to-morrow morning. It is too late to-night, you know."

"Yes," said Mr. Merritt, and he gave the order to the coachman, "Wesleyan Flats," and got in and seated himself beside her.

They bowled along Pennsylvania Avenue to Fourteenth Street, and up that street to the northern terminus, and then turned west, and drove until they reached the new, tall, red-brick building named after the great Methodist.

When the hack drew up before the door Roma noticed that lights were burning only in the hall and in the first floor front. She went up the steps and rang the bell while her old friend was taking out her bag and wraps and telling the coachman to wait for him.

Mrs. Brown, the janitress, opened the door herself.

"Oh, Miss Fronde! I am so glad to see you back again," she said.

"And you sat up for me That was very kind," Roma replied.

"It is only half-past eleven. I am seldom in bed before this time," said the janitress as they all went toward the elevator and entered it.

'Pollyon Syphax was on duty there.

"Where is Titus?" inquired Miss Fronde.

Titus was the elevator boy who had been on duty during Roma's first sojourn in the house.

"Titus? Oh, poor little fellow! the work, including the late hours, was too much for him. He is in the Children's Hospital," replied Mrs. Brown as the elevator landed them all on the first floor, and she led the way to Roma's new apartments—front parlor,

bedroom and bathroom. The gas was lighted and the windows hoisted, though the Venetian shutters were closed, but let in the cool night air through the slats.

"I hope the child is not seriously ill?" Roma said interrogatively.

"Oh, no. He has been so, but now he is getting well," replied the janitress.

"I will take him down to the Isle of Storms with me," was Roma's thought as she sat down in an easy-chair and took off her bonnet.

"Now, what shall I bring you to eat?" inquired Mrs. Brown.

"Nothing at this late hour. I had tea on the train. Where is my old friend Tom?"

"Oh, he and his mother both left at the end of the season. They are living in a one-room shanty in the woods west of this, and she is washing, and her boy fetches and carries the clothes backward and forward."

"I will make them both happy by taking them back to the Isle of Storms, to the old home they have been pining for," was Roma's secret thought.

"You see," said Mrs. Brown, "the house is nearly empty at this season. The few permanent tenants have their own servants, and cook their own meals. The restaurant requires but one cook and one waiter. Sarah Ann Syphax and her brother 'Pollyon fill these places. My own son, George, runs the elevator at present, but as he has gone to bed, 'Pollyon obligingly undertook to do it to-night, his duties at the restaurant being over for the evening."

Mr. Merritt had seated himself in the big armchair, and was debating in his own mind whether he should tell Roma of the dispatch he had received that day announcing the discovery of little Owlet in the streets of New York. He decided not to do so that night, lest the news should deprive Roma of sleep, so he got up and said:

"Well, now, my dear, as I see you are safe under Mrs. Brown's wing, I will bid you good-night."

"But you will come to-morrow morning?" said Roma.

"I fear not. I have a case in court that may occupy me all day."

"Then come and dine with me at seven in the evening."

"With pleasure. Good-night, my dear. Get to bed as soon as you can."

"Good-night, good friend. Sincere thanks for all your kindness," said Roma, holding out her hand. The lawyer pressed it and went his way.

But Mrs. Brown, late as it was, was disinclined to move. She was rather inclined for a gossip. Sinking into the chair that Mr. Merritt had vacated, she said:

"I really thought, when Mr. Merritt engaged these rooms for you, that you were coming here on your bridal tour."

"Why should you have thought so?" demanded Roma.

"Because that gentleman who came here soon after you left as good as told me that he and you were soon to be married, and as good as promised to bring you here on your bridal tour."

"What gentleman?"

"Why, Mr. William Hanson."

"Tell me all about his visit."

"Why, he came here to inquire after you. Somebody had told him you were staying here. He said he had been on a long voyage, and I think he said he had been shipwrecked; in that way he had lost trace of you. He asked me ever so many questions, and made me tell him all about you—every single thing. About your goodness to Madam Nouvellini and your adoption of her orphan child, and your devotion to the little one, and all; and he just as good as told me how you was engaged to be married to him, and just as good as pledged his word that he would bring you here on your bridal tour."

"Then he told you absolute falsehoods. I never was engaged to the man, and never could have been so."

"See that, now! Maybe you didn't even know him?"

"I used to know him—never as a friend, even, for I could never have had the slightest confidence in his honor or honesty."

"See that, now!"

A clock not far off struck twelve.

"Well, Miss Fronde, I won't keep you up. Good-night," said the janitress.

"Good-night," replied Roma, and the elder woman left the room.

"Then that man did know that Owlet was his own child," she said. "No doubt, hearing of my attachment to the little one, he came down to Goblin Hall especially to make a bargain with me to the effect that if I wished to keep my pet I must take him, too. But as I absolutely refused to admit him, he watched his opportunity, abducted the child, and wrote to me cautiously from a distance. It is a wonder he did not take her by a legal process. But, ah! I see. To do that he would have been obliged to confess his marriage with the ballet girl, and he knew that he could safely abduct her and that I could do nothing. Oh, my poor little Owl! Dr. Shaw may say what he pleases, but I know that dandy devil, William Hanson, is quite capable—not of killing the child, for he is too much afraid of the penalty, but of doing worse by her—of losing her, or throwing her away, as soon as he finds that he cannot use her as a bait for me. Poor little Owl!" Roma said to herself with a profound sigh.

Presently she arose and went into her comfortable bedroom, undressed, and went to bed.

Her sixteen hours of continuous railway riding, which might have fatigued a less robust woman "half to death," only prepared her to enjoy a luxurious repose; and so, notwithstanding her uneasiness on little Owlet's account, she soon fell into a profound sleep that lasted until late in the morning.

She awoke at last from such a state of deep unconsciousness that, on opening her eyes, she was surprised to find herself in a strange, modern, elegantly

furnished chamber, instead of her old-fashioned bedroom at Goblin Hall.

Then, almost instantly, she remembered where she was and what she had to do.

She arose quickly, opened her windows, bathed and dressed, and went to the elevator.

Mrs. Brown's son, George, a lad fourteen years old, was on duty. She bade him good-morning, and went all the way down to "Rebecca's Well," as the restaurant in the basement was daintily called.

It was late, and there was no one in the place except the very tall, very gaunt and very black waiter with the baleful name.

She seated herself at one of the smaller tables and touched the bell.

'Pollyon Syphax came to her at once. She ordered breakfast, and was promptly served.

Then she asked the waiter if he could direct her to the house occupied by Lucy and her boy Tom.

"Yo' can't miss ob it, ma'am. It is yight in de bit o' woods lef' back ob dis yere house," he told her.

So, as soon as she had finished her breakfast she went upstairs to her room, put on her walking jacket, hat and gloves, and went down and out to find her colored friends.

She had only to go to the corner of the building, turn into an open brier and thistle-grown lot, and cross it to the bit of wood at the back of the big house.

There, nestled among the trees, she saw the little whitewashed shanty, with clotheslines full of newly washed clothes hanging all around it.

"Poor souls!" Roma said to herself. "That is the nearest approach to the country life they long for to be found in the suburbs of the city; and how much better is that little nest in the fragrant pine wood than a room in a stifling tenement house."

As she walked toward the shanty, Lucy, in a red turban and a blue gown, came out of the house with a tub of clothes in her hands, and began to take them out and hang them on the line.

She was so intent upon her work that she did not see Miss Fronde until that young lady came immediately behind her and said:

"How do you do, Aunt Lucy?"

"Who dat?" exclaimed the woman, with a start. "Lor' b'ess my po' soul, young miss! I t'ought it was a speerit as spoke, I did, fo' a fac'! So yo's com'd back? 'Deed, I's moughty proud to see yo', honey. C'ome in de house. Tom, he's gone to ca'ay some clo'es home; he'll stan' on his head w'en he years yo' is com'd back—'deed he will!"

Roma followed the woman into the shanty, and found the poorest, barest, but cleanest little nest that ever two blackbirds found shelter in.

The little bed in the corner, the big stove, with its boiler, and the wooden bench with its washtub, seemed to fill all the space.

Roma sat down on a three-legged stool, because there was no better seat in the place.

"I am going down to the old house on the Isle of Storms, Lucy. How would you and your boy like to go with me?" inquired Roma.

The woman stared at her so stupidly that Miss Fronde repeated the question.

Then Lucy burst out suddenly:

"Oh, Miss Yoma! 'Ow would I like to go back to dat b'essed ole p'ace? 'Ow would I like to go to hebben, w'en my time come? Not as I'm in any huyey to go dere, neider. I t'ought I was gwine to hebben w'en I 'mancipated de ole p'ace an' com'd yere. But, Lor'!"

"And so you would like to return, then?"

"Like! W'y, youn' mist'ess, I jeams ob it at night. I jeams as I'm back dere in my log house, a-smokin' ob my sweet corncob pipe by my b'ight pine-knot fire, an' I feels so happy, an' finks as it is yeal, an' dis yere was de jeam. Den I wakes up, an' sometimes I cwies. It mos' b'eaks my heart. It do, fo' a fac'. Sometimes Tom say to me, he say, 'Mammy, w'at de matter wid yo'?' An' I say, 'Oh, Tom!' I can say no mo'n dat."

"When can you be ready to go with me, Lucy?"

"Any time—dis minit!—w'ich I doane mean zackly dat, but soon's ebber I finishes ob dem clo'es w'at's hangin' on de line, w'ich will be dis werry arternoon, 'ca'se one mus' keep deir 'gagements, yo' know, ma'am."

"Certainly," assented Roma.

"But I can be yeady to go to-night or moyer mo'nin'."

"To-morrow morning will be quite time enough."

"An' I s'pose I kin take my furn'ture 'long ob me in de boat, Miss Yoma?"

Miss Fronde looked around on the property in question, pathetic in its utter poverty, and then said:

"Certainly, if you wish to take it; but when you enter my service I will give you much better furniture than this for your cottage on the Isle."

"All yight, den, youn' mist'ess. I kin jus' gib dese yere fings to po' Sa'a Ann Syphax, w'ich is a berry po' 'oman, w'ich I fink people as is well off an' has yich ladies fo' fr'en's, 'ad ought to be good to de po'. Doane yo'?"

"Yes, indeed. Now, good-by, Lucy. I have a great deal to do to-day, and so I see have you. Tell Tom to come to see me this afternoon."

"Oh, won't he, dough! Yopes wouldn' hol' him w'en he know yo' back!" exclaimed the woman.

Roma did not return immediately to the Wesleyan, but walked down to Fourteenth Street and took a car, intending to go to the Children's Hospital.

On arriving at the building she asked to see Titus Blair, and was shown to the convalescent ward, where the boy was walking about, amusing himself with some half dozen of his companions.

As soon as he saw Miss Fronde his pale, thin face lighted up with joy, and he came to meet her as fast as his feeble limbs could fetch him.

Roma took his hand, and made him sit down on the bench that ran along the wall, and without referring to his illness at all, she asked the orphan boy where he was to go after leaving the hospital.

Titus said that he did not know. He supposed he would go somewhere and sell papers or matches until the first of December, when the busy season came, and then he thought he would be taken on again at the Wesleyan to run the elevator.

"How would you like to go with me to my seaside house for the summer?" Miss Fronde inquired.

"Oh, that would be so good!" he exclaimed.

"Then you shall go with me. I will speak to the house physician, and find out if you are fit to be discharged in time to accompany me. Good-by, now."

"An' de little miss, ma'am—is she well?"

"Owlet was well when I saw her last," replied Miss Fronde evasively.

And then she hurried away, to avoid answering more direct questions about her lost pet.

She went to the office of the house physician and had an interview with him, in which she learned that she might take the boy to the seaside as soon as she should please to do so.

From the hospital Roma went to the office of her father's old friend, Dr. Washburn, but not finding him, she sat down at his table and wrote a note, asking him to call on her, if possible, during the afternoon.

By the time Roma got back to her apartments at the Wesleyan it was six o'clock, and time to dress for her tête-à-tête dinner with Mr. Merritt.

She ordered the table to be set in her private parlor, and then went into her bedroom to make her toilet.

In twenty minutes, or less time, she came out, dressed in a simple gray silk gown, with fine lace at throat and wrists.

As she entered the room at one door some one came in at the other.

And the next instant Owlet had flown like a bird into her arms.

CHAPTER XXIX

ROMA AND HER ASPIRATIONS

"Oh, Lady! Lady! Lady! Oh, Lady! Lady! Lady!" cried Owlet, in a wild rapture of delight, as she clung about the neck and bosom of her benefactress.

"Owlet! Why, Owlet! Darling! Mr. Merritt—what does all this mean?" demanded Miss Fronde, in supreme astonishment, as she returned the child's caresses, and raised her eyes to the lawyer's amused face.

He had just entered after Owlet, and now stood looking on the scene.

"I did not want her to take you by surprise," he said. "I wanted to come in first, and tell you that she had been found and brought back; but, heavens! she darted past me and into your arms as soon as the door was opened."

"Oh, Lady! Lady! Lady! I saw you, and I couldn't help it! I couldn't! I couldn't! I couldn't! I know I'm not possessed of common sense now, but I don't care! I don't care! so I'm possessed of you!" exclaimed the child in an ecstasy of joy.

"When Owlet becomes calm you will perhaps explain where she was found, how she came here, and who brought her," Roma said.

Mr. Merritt nodded, and sat down.

It was not long, however, before the child's transports subsided, and she lay, quiet and contented, on the bosom of her lady.

Presently she said:

"Lady, where is dear little Ducky Darling? Did you bring her here with you?"

"No, my dear. I could not take her away from her father and mother, you know," Roma answered.

"Oh, no; so you couldn't. Are you going back soon, Lady?"

"In about a month, dear."

"Then we will take Ducky Darling some dolls. She likes dolls, if I don't. Did she cry after me?"

"Yes, dear."

"I knew she would! Poor little Ducky Darling!" said Owlet, and once more she subsided into silence, with her head on Miss Fronde's bosom.

"Am I too heavy for you, Lady? Do I tire you?" she inquired at length.

"No, darling; not at all," Miss Fronde replied, smiling at the idea of herself being fatigued.

"Do I bother you a bit, lying here?"

"Not in the least."

"Oh! you know it has been so long! so long! since I saw you! So many, many years! years and years! and years! I did think I would never see you no more! Never no more! Never no more! Oh, Lady!"

"You shall never leave me again, my dear, if I can possibly help it."

"That man who took me away was not possessed of common sense. Now, was he, Lady?"

"I am afraid he had not that excuse for his wickedness; but don't think anything more about him, dear. Try to compose yourself," Miss Fronde said gently, smoothing the brown curls away from the flushed little face.

"Yes, I will do everything you tell me," said the child, and with a sigh of infinite satisfaction she subsided into quietude, and soon into sleep.

Roma only waited to feel assured that the slumber was too profound to be disturbed by movement, and then she arose softly, carried the child into her own chamber, laid her on the bed, loosened her clothes, and left her fast asleep.

Then she returned to the sitting-room, where she found the lawyer still waiting for her.

She sat down beside him and said:

"Now, if you please, explain this affair to me, Mr. Merritt."

The lawyer gave her a "brief" of the case.

"We already know by inference from the evidence collected at Goeberlin, that the child was chloro-

formed when she was snatched away from Goblin Hall. We also know that she was passed off, in her insensibility, as a sick child, fast asleep, and that Hanson took a small private compartment in the Pullman car for himself and the child. All this we know from what we heard from railway officials and others."

"But afterward—afterward!" said Miss Fronde.

"Afterward, from what could be gathered from the child's disjointed story, which, by the way, confirmed the truth of all the foregoing collected from Goeberlin, it seems that her abductor must have administered some narcotic to her in her food at some way station not far from Goeberlin. She must have slept all the way from the neighborhood of Goeberlin to New York City, for after she came to, after a long illness—for it seems she really was very ill when that fellow wrote to you——"

"Poor child! Poor, weary dove!" sighed Roma.

"When she came to herself," resumed the lawyer, "after a dangerous illness, caused, no doubt, by the effects of the horrible drugs that had been given her, she had no sense of the time or space that had been passed since her abduction. She thought she had only been away a day or so, and that she was still in the neighborhood of Goblin Hall, and her one longing and one prayer was to be carried back to you."

"My poor little Owlet!"

"At last she ran away from her strange owner, and went, like some poor, little, lost dog, to hunt its mistress through the wide, wide world. But she thought that Goblin Hall lay somewhere among the woods and fields outside the city. She went, trying to find her way out, until she wandered down somewhere—it must have been in the neighborhood of the old Five Points, for she fell into the hands of a thieving ragpicker, who beguiled her into some den, stole her clothes, wrapped her in an old rag of a shawl, took her away in the dead of night, carried her some distance, left her under a stoop, and deserted her."

"Oh, heavens! How long ago was that?"

"Only two nights."

"How was she found? Who rescued her? Who brought her to Washington? Go on, please!"

The lawyer paused for a moment and then answered:

"William Harcourt."

"William Harcourt!" echoed Roma in boundless amazement.

"Yes," quietly replied Mr. Merritt.

"How, in the name of heaven and all the angels, could he have found her?" demanded Miss Fronde in unabated wonder.

"He was in New York at the time. He was coming out of his lodging-house, in the gray of the morning, on the day before yesterday, when he heard a moan of distress near the steps. He followed the sound and found the child. She was half dead with cold, hunger and fright. He took her in, and with the assistance of a poor seamstress, a fellow lodger in the house, he succored her until she was able to give some account of herself—just such a confused account as a child of six years, who had been drugged, first with chloroform and then with opium, and brought three hundred miles in a state of stupor, had had brain fever, and had come to her senses to find herself in a strange city, among strangers, had run away, had fallen among total thieves, had been left to die under a stoop, and had been found half dead, might be supposed to be able to give."

"Oh, the dastardly villain!

"'There may be heaven!—there must be hell!'"

exclaimed Miss Fronde, as the words of Browning rushed into her mind.

"In the child's imperfect story they heard such names as 'Roma,' 'Goblin Hall,' 'Dr. Shaw,' and even that of your humble servant. Of course, Harcourt recognized these names at once, and he knew from what place the child had been stolen, though he did

not know the name of the thief, nor the motive of the theft; for those the child did not herself know, and could not tell him."

"And did Will Harcourt send the child to Washington?"

"Wait a moment. First of all, he wired me that the child had been found. That was on the day before yesterday. You were on your way from Goeberlin Hall to Washington. I could not consult you; therefore, I wired back that you could not interfere in the case of the recovered child. I thought I would tell you all about it when you should get to Washington, but you arrived late, and I did not wish to tell you any news that might keep you awake all night. I deferred the announcement until this afternoon. In the meantime, it seems Harcourt received a telegram from Miss Wynthrop, summoning him immediately to his mother's sick bed. In his dilemma as to what he should do with the forlorn child, he decided to bring her with him, and even take her, if necessary, to Lone Lodge. On his arrival in Washington he brought her to my office, giving us, as it were, the refusal of her. I thought, when I heard his statement, that under the circumstances you might receive her, and having this engagement to dine with you this evening, I ventured to bring the child with me."

"Of course I will receive her, and of course I will hereafter protect her against the unnatural monster who deserted her to destitution in her helpless infancy, and afterward stole her for blackmail and endangered her life with his poisonous drugs."

"I do not think that he will ever again disturb you in the possession of the child. I do not think he will dare to do it," said Mr. Merritt earnestly.

"I do not think he will. But why did not Will Harcourt himself bring me the child?" Roma inquired, not without some bitterness.

"My dear, remember that he had to take the first train west to fly to his mother's sick bed. He had to hurry on. He really had no alternative, Roma. Yet, I will not deceive you. He told me that under no

circumstances should he dare to present himself before Miss Fronde," said the lawyer.

"Ah, heaven! Oh, my dear guardian, what can be this hidden horror that parts my friend from me?" demanded Miss Fronde, with a profound sigh.

"It is no secret to me, I think, my dear. It is, of course, his complicity in the matter of that fraudulent marriage."

"No! no! no! no!" indignantly exclaimed the lady. "It is some mental disturbance, superinduced upon his brain fever, and of which Hanson, the fiend, took advantage."

"I fear that it is something more serious than mental disturbance which we have hitherto supposed to be the cause of his strange conduct. Since my interview with him this afternoon I have been under the impression that he is suffering from some deep remorse."

"Remorse!—Will Harcourt!" Roma fairly gasped for breath in her astonishment.

"He said that in a few days we should know all—or words to that effect."

Roma sighed deeply.

"But to change the subject, my dear, what are you going to do with the child, now that you have so much upon your hands?" inquired the lawyer, to divert the lady's mind from the sorrowful mystery of William Harcourt.

"I shall keep her with me, wherever I may be; take her with me, wherever I may go. She will be no hindrance."

"But when you go to Scotland?"

"I shall take her with me to Scotland; and, moreover, in the interests of the orphan, I shall take her to see that awful ancestress of hers, that Highland chieftainess and Covenanter, Mistress Griselda Margaret Arbuthnot, of Arbuthnot Kill, Cuthbert, Caithness. There's name, title and place for you."

At this moment 'Pollyon Syphax entered the parlor to lay the cloth for dinner, and by so doing stopped the conversation for the time being.

It was a tête-à-tête dinner, but as the waiter with the baleful name was in attendance all the time there could be no confidential communication between lawyer and client.

Dinner was scarcely over, and the table cleared off, when Dr. Washburn was announced.

Roma arose to meet him with outstretched hand.

"How good of you to come so promptly, dear doctor," she said.

"Miss Fronde should know that I am always at her orders, and happy to serve her," replied the worthy, old-fashioned gentleman, lifting the tips of her fingers to his lips and bowing over them.

Then he shook hands with Lawyer Merritt, who was an old friend, and sank into the deep armchair Miss Fronde had drawn forward for him.

After some informal conversation Roma broached the subject on which she wished to consult him, namely, the organization of a sanitorium for the poor, on the Isle of Storms.

The doctor had by this time come to understand the daughter of his old friend, Colonel Fronde, or to think that he did, and in his private opinion he set her down as a very eccentric woman, as well as a very rich and beautiful one, who meant to live the life of a philanthropic old maid, like that of the then Miss Burdette Coutts. He knew perfectly well that it would be utterly useless for any one to oppose her in her projects, so he thought the best policy for him to pursue, both in her interest and in that of those whom she wished to benefit, would be to fall in with her plans and give her the advantage of his advice and assistance in all the details of the humane enterprise.

The three friends sat down at a table together, with pencils and tablets in hand, and talked "sanitorium" all the evening.

"I shall not be able to get off by the boat to-morrow morning, Mr. Merritt. There is so much more to be done here in the city than I had calculated upon that I doubt very much whether I shall be able to go be-

fore next week," said Miss Fronde as she closed her well-filled notebook at the end of the conference.

"The longer you may be detained here, Miss Fronde, the better we shall all be pleased," said Dr. Washburn, striking into the conversation as he rose to take leave.

Both gentlemen bade the young lady a cordial good-night and went away.

A few minutes later there came a modest tap at the door, and to Miss Fronde's pleasant "Come in!" Tom entered.

He had a broad smile on his good-natured face. He plucked his old hat off his head and bowed, and continued to bow, and smiled, and continued to smile, until Miss Fronde held out her hand and said:

"How do you do, Tom? Come here and shake hands with me."

Then he shyly approached the gracious lady, and took the hand she offered him, and showed his love and honor in the best way he knew how, by slowly swaying it up and down, smiling all the while in respectful silence, until Miss Fronde gently withdrew her fingers and inquired:

"How have you been since I saw you last, Tom?"

"Firs' yate, mist'ess. Been fetchin' an' ca'in' clo'es back'a'ds an' fo'a'ds fo' mammy," Tom answered.

Then he smiled a broader smile than ever, and said:

"Soon's ebber mammy tol' me how yo' was come back yere I yunned yight ober yere to pay my 'bed'ence; but Mr. 'Pollyon Syphax tol' me how yo' had comp'ny, ma'am, so I didn' like to 'trude; but I's moughty p'oud to see yo', mist'ess, 'deed I is."

"Thank you, Tom. How would you like to go to the Isle of Storms with me?"

"I'd des like to go to de een' ob de worl' 'long o' yo', mist'ess; but I'd yudder go to dat ole p'ace wiv yo' dan to any yudder p'ace on dis yeth—I would, fo' a fac'," said Tom, almost tempted to turn a somersault in his delight.

"Then you shall go."

"How is little Miss Cafferine, mist'ess?"

"She is well. She is with me here. She will go with us to the Isle of Storms."

"Oh! aine I g'ad! We shall all be so happy, mist'ess."

"I hope so. Now, Tom, as it is late, you had better go home to your mother. She may be uneasy about you."

"Yes, mist'ess, dat's so. So mammy mought. Good-night, mist'ess."

"Good-night, Tom." The boy went away.

Roma passed into her chamber, and seeing her newly recovered pet sleeping most sweetly and safely on the outside of her bed, kneeled down by the side and gave thanks to heaven for the restoration of the child. Then she prayed for Will Harcourt.

Finally she arose, and undressed the little slumberer, so softly and deftly that the latter did not wake.

Only as she laid her between the sheets Owlet murmured in her dreams something about "Lady" and "Ducky Darling," and some one else who "was not possessed of common sense." Then almost instantly she relapsed into sound sleep.

Roma went to bed.

Toward morning Owlet talked again in her sleep, this time of "Mr. William" and of "Mrs. Annie."

In the gray of the dawn she half awoke, and spoke to her bedfellow, calling her "Mrs. Annie."

But when Miss Fronde replied, Owlet instantly remembered where she was, and with a sigh of ineffable content she sank into happy sleep again.

CHAPTER XXX

OWLET HARPS UPON HER 'VENTURES

In the morning, when both awoke almost simultaneously to a new sense of their reunion, the sun was shining through their front windows.

When they arose from bed, Roma would have begun to wash and dress little Owlet, just from the impulse of passionate affection, intensified by the startling loss and sudden recovery of the child; but the changeling, independent and self-reliant as ever, insisted that she both could and would wash and dress her "own self."

Which she did, making herself, in her cheap calico frock and white apron, look like a rumpled pink and white hollyhock.

Then they went down by the elevator.

George Brown, son of the janitress, was running it.

"Where's Titus?" inquired Owlet. "He wasn't here when Mr. Merritt brought me up in it."

"Titus, dear, has been sick in the hospital, but he is getting well now," Roma explained.

The elevator touched the basement floor, and they got out.

When they entered the restaurant they found Tom waiting for them.

Owlet left Miss Fronde's side and made a dash at him.

"Oh, Tom! I am so glad to see you!"

"So am I you, Miss Cafferine—moughty g'ad an' moughty p'oud! But I doane lib yere now. No mo' do mammy. She take in washin', an' I fetch an' ca'y out clo'es."

"How is it, then, that you are here this morning, Tom?" gently inquired Miss Fronde.

"Yo' see, mist'ess, dey aine no clo'es to ca'y out no mo'. Mammy say as how she aine got no mo' call to do no mo' washin', 'ca'se she's gwine down to de ole Sarpin' to serve 'long ob yo', mammy say. So I ax mammy, mought I come ober yere to wait on yo' table dis mornin', an' mammy say, 'Yes, it is yo' duty,' mammy say. An' den I yun ober yere an' ax Mr. 'Pollyon Syphax mought I wait on yo' table, an' den I would help him wiv de udders for nuffin, 'ca'se I did wan' to wait on my own mist'ess and Miss Cafferine. An' Mr. 'Pollyon Syphax he say I mought, Mr. 'Poll-

yon did. An' so yere I is," said Tom, with a broad grin of satisfaction.

"Thank you, Tom. It was very kind and thoughtful of you to come," said Miss Fronde, and her words filled the boy's heart to overflowing with delight.

And he served with zeal and dispatch.

After breakfast Roma took Owlet up to her room, and said:

"Now, my dear, the very first thing we have to do this morning is to go down to Pennsylvania Avenue and get you an outfit."

Owlet looked down at her common pink calico frock and white apron critically, and said:

"Yes. This was pretty. I liked it very much when Mrs. Annie first gave it to me, but now it is all rumpled up, isn't it?"

"I should think so," said Roma, with a smile.

"Well, you see, I wore it all day Monday, and rode in it all day yesterday, and went to sleep in it on the cars, and tumbled about in it on the cushions, I reckon, so now my frock is a sight to behold. Oh! isn't it, though?"

"Never mind, dear. Cover it with your little coat. That is very decent," said Roma.

"Yes. You see, woolen things don't rumple like calico, do they, now?" said Owlet as she drew on the little brown coat and carefully buttoned it up before.

She next put on her little brown hat and gloves, and was ready to go out by the time Miss Fronde got on her own walking jacket, hat and gloves.

They went down together, and out upon the sidewalk.

"Would you like to go and see where Aunt Lucy and Tom live?" Roma asked as they left the house.

"Oh, wouldn't I though!" Owlet exclaimed.

"Very well, then; we will go."

They turned around the corner, scrambled through the bramble lot, and reached the piece of woods in which Lucy's bird nest stood.

"Oh! ain't it just like a chicken coop?" merrily demanded Owlet.

"Something of the sort," assented Roma.

They entered the cabin, and found Lucy mending old clothes, and Tom, who had returned from the restaurant, was actually helping her, with needle, thread and thimble.

As soon as Tom saw the visitors he sneaked his work behind his back, with all a boy's false shame at being caught at woman's work.

"Mornin' youn' mist'ess. Hopes I sees yo' well, ma'am," said Lucy, rising and placing two three-legged chairs for her visitors. "How do, Miss Cafferine? Yo' doane look as peart as yo' used to did. Been sick?"

"Yes," said Owlet as she seated herself on a very low stool beside Miss Fronde's rather larger one. "I should think I had been sick. And I have been away from Lady so long—years and years and years. And I have had 'ventures. Not stories, mind you, like Jack the Giant Killer, and that, because that's nonsense; but real, bloody-minded 'ventures. No wonder I look bad. Wonder my hair isn't turned gray. I should have been dead and gone by this time if Mr. William hadn't found me and fetched me back."

Lucy, with eyes and mouth both wide open, turned from the child to the lady, and inquired:

"Wot de yittle fing mean, youn' mist'ess?"

"She was stolen from me while we were at Goblin Hall, and she has been very ill. But she was brought back to me, safe and well, last night. We will not talk any more about it at present, Lucy."

"All yight, youn' mist'ess, ef yo' say so, we won't. But, oh, the williany ob some people on dis yeth! Ef eber I cotch my eye on dat low-life trash, whoeber it was wot don' it—umph-humphe!—dere'll be a foot yace or a fun'al. Now min'!"

"Well, Lucy, I only come to let Catherine see your little house, and now we must go. Good-by," said Miss Fronde, rising.

"Good-by, youn' mist'ess. Me an' Tom'll be ready to go 'long ob yo' any time now."

"I shall not go before next week; but in the mean-

time you may want to make purchases before you go. Take this on account, for you and him," said Miss Fronde, and she put a twenty-dollar note in Lucy's hand.

"Oh! thanky, youn' mist'ess! Thanky, ma'am! Lor'! dis is twice mo' money'n ebber I had 'fo' in all de days ob my pilg-imidge," said Lucy, courtesying between every sentence.

"I gwine to come to wait on yo' at dinner time, mist'ess. I gwine to come wait on yo' table ebbery time w'ile yo' stay inter dat house. Mr. 'Pollyon Syphax say how I may. Mr. 'Pollyon Syphax moughty 'bligin' colored gemman, Mr. 'Pollyon Syphax am," said Tom, smiling in delight.

"Well, I fink 'Pollyon Syphax mought be 'bligin' on such 'casions. Yo' doin' his work fo' him, an' me a gibbin' Sa' Ann Syphax my own house, wot me an' yo' knock togedder wiv our own han's out'n de ole camp lumber, an' all de stools an' de fings as we made ourse'ves! An' all a f'ee gif'! I des yeckon how 'Pollyon Syphax mought be 'bligin'."

Roma left Lucy holding forth on the Syphax indebtedness, and with a smiling nod turned away from the cabin.

She led Owlet back across the bramble lot and down the street to the northern starting point of the Fourteenth Street cars, found one empty, and got into it with her.

They rode all the way down to the southern terminus, corner of F Street, where they got out.

Roma, leading her protégée, walked across to the avenue, and down it to a well-known emporium of ready-made clothing.

They entered this establishment, which was a perfect treasury of necessary, useful and beautiful articles of wearing apparel for women and children of all ages and conditions.

It required but a short time to select from such stores a sufficient outfit for the child.

Having ordered her purchases to be sent to her

address, Roma took Owlet to the Children's Hospital, to see Titus Blair.

The lad was quite overjoyed to see so soon again the lady who had promised to take him to the seaside, and with her the little playmate whom he had known at the Wesleyan Flats.

"She used to ride up and down in the elevator with me a great many times a day, ma'am. It was almost the onliest amoosement she had, afore yo' took her in han', poor little thing!" Titus explained, looking fondly at the child.

"I know," said Miss Fronde.

Owlet seated herself beside the invalid boy, and said:

"Titus, I have got such lots and lots and lots to tell you! Not such stories like Cinderella, because them's all lies, you know; but real, awful 'ventures with a wicked man, who was not possessed of a grain of common sense, and stole children away and made them go dead! Yes, and about horrid old women who smell enough to knock you down, and tell you such lies! Oh! I've got lots of 'ventures to tell you, Titus."

The boy stared first at the child and then at the lady.

"Yes, Titus," she said, "little Catherine was stolen from Goblin Hall, but you see we have got her back, safe and well. Now do not let us talk about it any more to-day. It is not good for either of you. The doctor says you can go to the seaside any time with me now."

"Oh! can I, ma'am? Oh! won't that be just glorious!"

"I hope it will do you good. I expect to leave on next Saturday. Have you clothes enough, my boy? Or have you lost them during your illness?"

"I have some underclo'es here, ma'am, an' this suit wot I'm a-wearin' ob now; an' I've got a Sunday suit in my ole garret loft at the Vesleyan, ma'am," said the boy, with some pride in his poor wardrobe.

"Yes, I know you had very nice clothes when you an the elevator. You were always very neat."

"Had to be, ma'am, an' it took 'mos' all my wages fo' to keep me so; but ef I hadn't been I'd 'a' lost my place, sure as a gun."

"Have you any money left, my boy?"

"Just a dollar 'n eighty cents, ma'am, an' I'm thinkin' as I ought to pay that to the hospital, ma'am. It aine much to offer 'em fo' all dey don' fo' me, but it's ev'ry cen' I have, an' I think I ought ter offer it ter 'em. What do yo' think, ma'am?"

"I think you are quite right, and you might offer it to the hospital," said Miss Fronde, who was much too wise to discourage a boy in his impulse of justice or generosity, from any mistaken kindness to him.

"Mrs. Brown has got it keepin' fo' me. Will yo' please ask her to send it ter me, so I kin give it ter 'em?"

"Certainly; and I will send it over by Tom this afternoon," Roma replied. Then, wishing to test the boy further, she inquired:

"If you pay all your savings away, Titus, what will you do when you get well?"

"Go to work, ma'am. An' I should do that anyways, whether I had any tin or no," promptly replied the lad.

"But perhaps you might not be able to get work."

"Oh, yes, I should, ma'am. I never was out'n it till I got sick. Ef I can't get one sort o' work I can get anudder. Yo' see, ma'am, I can turn my han' to 'mos' anythin' in the way o' plain, hard work," said the lad, with sublime self-reliance, and with unconscious heroism.

"Oh-h-h! Ain't he possessed of common sense!" exclaimed Owlet in a rapture of admiration.

"I quite agree with you, my little owl," said Roma as she arose to take leave of the boy, repeating her promise to send Tom with his money in the afternoon.

"Thanky, ma'am. I'll be awful glad to see old Tom! I haven't seen him since I have been in de hospital. I reckon Tom was too bashful to come an' see me, 'mong so many strangers."

"Very likely; but he will be glad to come when he

has the excuse of being sent on an errand," said Miss Fronde.

Before Roma left the hospital she spoke to both nurse and doctor, telling them that as she had permission to do so, she should take Titus Blair away on some evening, so as to have him ready to go with her party the next week.

When they reached Miss Fronde's apartments at the Wesleyan they found that Owlet's new outfit had arrived.

Owlet dressed herself in a seal-brown cashmere frock, trimmed with satin of the same color, and went down with her lady to dinner.

They found Tom there, waiting to serve them.

When the dishes of the first course had been placed upon the table Roma said:

"Tom, I wish to send you on an errand this afternoon, to take something to Titus Blair, at the Children's Hospital."

"All yight, mist'ess," said the boy, with a bow. "I'll be yeady to go 'mediately arter dinner. I be moughty p'oud to go see po' Titus."

Half an hour later Roma got the sick boy's little purse from Mrs. Brown and gave it to Tom to take to its owner.

"You may tell Titus that you are going to the Isle of Storms with us, Tom. I forgot to do so," said Miss Fronde.

"Oh, mist'ess, I doane like to do dat," replied the boy.

"But why?"

"'Ca'se it make po' sick Titus feel so bad 'ca'se he can't go, too."

"But Titus is going with us."

"Oh, Lor', mist'ess! yo' doane say so? Oh, aine I glad!"

"Yes. Now run away, or it will be too late for you to get admission to the hospital."

Tom only waited until he reached the sidewalk before he turned a somersault for joy, stood on his head, and kicked, toppled over, picked himself up, and ran,

leaping and dancing, to the corner of Fourteenth Street, to take the car for the Children's Hospital.

That afternoon Roma found her first opportunity of questioning Owlet. She heard every detail of her abduction from Goblin Hall, her journey, and her sojourn in New York, that the child knew, and, much more than any one else, had been able to draw from her.

All Miss Fronde's worst suspicions were confirmed, and she resolved to defend little Owlet against Hanson, even if she should have to do so in the courts of justice, as the child's "best friend." She also emphasized her resolution to take the orphan to Scotland with her, and to bring her, if possible, to the acquaintance of that austere ancestress of whom poor Marguerite Nouvellini had spoken with so much awe. She had written three letters to that great lady, but had received no answers.

All the remainder of that week Roma spent in making her purchases and other preparations for the sanitorium; in doing all of which she was advised and assisted by Dr. Washburn.

By Tuesday evening all these goods had been packed and shipped on board the *John Gordon*, bound from the port of Georgetown to Norfolk and New York, and taking in the Isle of Storms, with other points, in its course.

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